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## WOOD CARVINGS OF GUJARAT



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V. S. PRAMAR

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## PREFACE

I am not a Gujarati, despite my Gujarati-sounding surname so that when I first took up a job as a lecturer in Architecture at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in 1965, I saw my surroundings as an 'outsider' with eyes of more than usual curiosity. And it was during a casual walk through the centre of the city, namely the older medieval parts, that I saw whole streets of carved wooden houses of a striking design and antique character. It was like being suddenly transported to a past which one thought had disappeared for ever. It is well-known that ancient Indian architecture had once been mainly in wood, but to actually see medieval wooden houses still surviving was a revelation. As an architect I had often seen illustrations of woodwork from Nepal and Tibet but never Gujarat, so that the surprise was the greater. It was like making a discovery, apparent only to an 'outsider', and I decided to take up this theme for further study. What emerged was not merely a study of woodwork but of wooden architecture as a whole, including life-style and settlement patterns.

This meant travelling all over Gujarat, searching for ancient houses, meeting the families concerned, spending days working in their homes, and recording details. To be received in a private dwelling, to be allowed to move about freely in every nook and corner, to work throughout the day in the midst of family chores, was a great personal experience and my first thanks are to those hundreds of families who thus offered us their generous hospitality. Additional thanks go to those students of architecture who voluntarily accompanied me during their vacations and shared in the work. All fieldwork was done by travelling in buses and walking through the kilometres of winding lanes and bye-ways of towns on what was, in effect, a voyage of discovery. To come across the descendants of former historical families : of *nagarseths* (town mayors), bankers to the Gaikwads, agents of the East India Company, *divans* of princely states, the *kazis* of Ahmedabad, keepers of the royal mint, all this made these journeys a kind of historical romance. Each family visited felt a sense of nostalgia and pride that 'their' dwelling was being documented for posterity. It must be added that many of the old houses have since disappeared: through natural decay or the plundering raids of antique dealers trading in wood carvings, so that this book is their only record. The illustrations will reveal what a great tradition of wood carving Gujarat once possessed.

Lastly I must thank Mrs Kalpana Palkhiwala, Assistant Editor of the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, for taking up this work for publication.

Ranchi, Bihar

V. S. Prammar

October, 2000

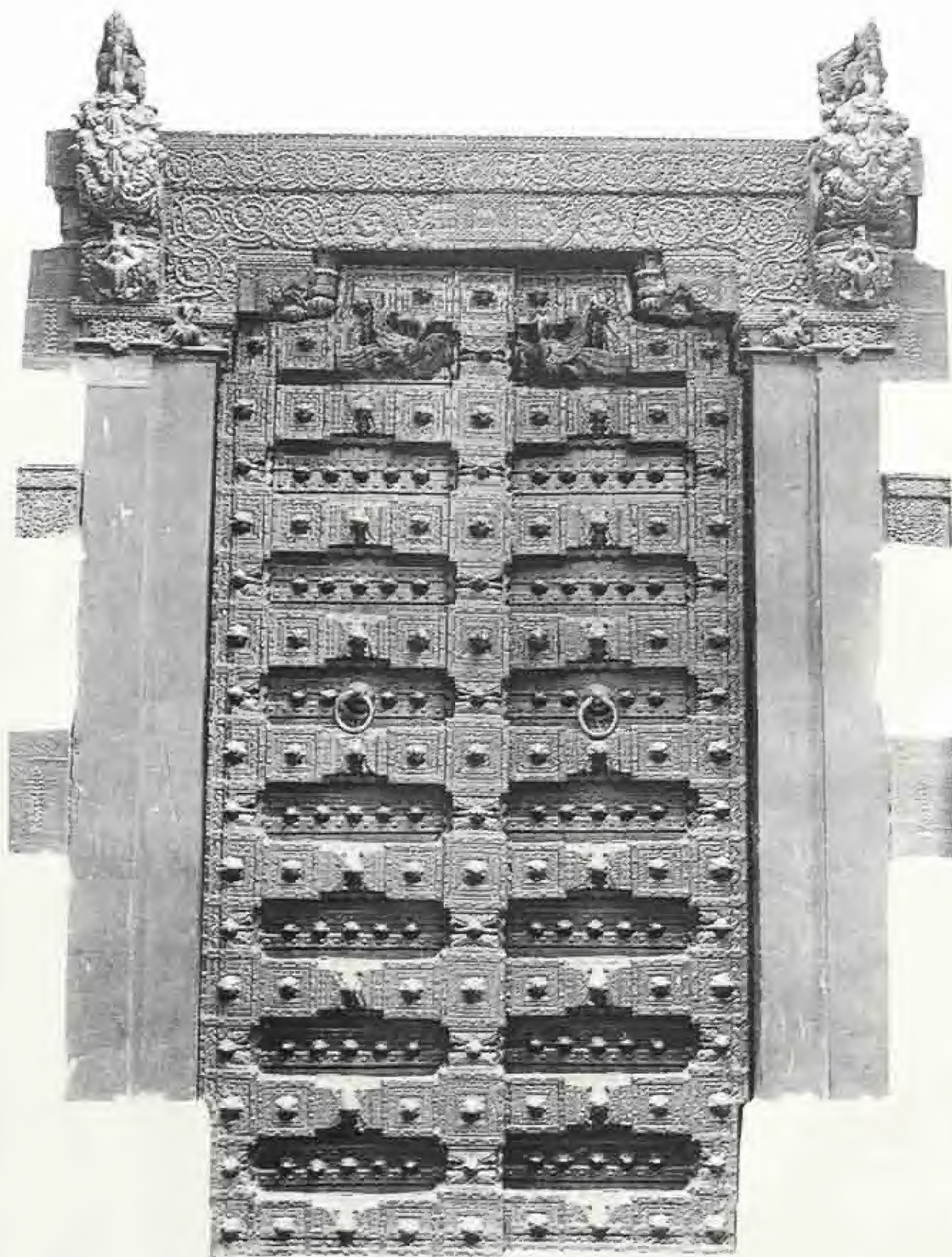


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# I

## INTRODUCTION

Gujarat has always been one of the most prosperous provinces in India. In medieval times, its merchants had established trading links with the important commercial ports of West Asia, East Africa, and even the Far East, while its own ports were centres of active exchange. These indigenous ports, located on the western coast, served a vast hinterland of the sub-continent, both for import and export, and some of their names are documented in ancient records. The *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, written by a Greek merchant in the 1st century A. D., describes the sea-route to the port of Broach (there called Barugaza), and mentions that Indian ships from here regularly visited West Asia.

During later Muslim times, it was the port of Cambay which became more important, and the name of Cambay virtually became synonymous with the kingdom of Gujarat. In subsequent colonial times, Surat took over as the chief centre for the European trade, and also as the port for the embarking of annual Muslim pilgrims to Mecca.

Fig. 1. An entrance door with elaborate treatment. The outer twin jambs are plain. The inner jamb carries the lintel, while the outer jamb carries the projecting *tolles*. They are beautifully carved. The twin lintels have carvings of spreading plants. The inner jamb carries a *purnaghatta* - a vase of plenty in the centre.

It is quite evident that the prosperity of Gujarat was largely derived from its foreign trade, and this source of prosperity also produced a commercially oriented life-style which has persisted up to the modern times. The wealth produced from trade drew a pointed comment from the Mughal emperor Humayun just after he had defeated the Gujarat Sultan, Bahadur Shah "... that while the throne of Delhi rests on wheat and barley, that of Gujarat on corals and pearls, because the king of Gujarat rules over eighty-four ports."<sup>1</sup>

This prosperity struck the European travellers and administrators who saw Gujarat as it was in the late medieval times. The French traveller Jean de Thevenot, writing in 1666, says, "This is the pleasantest Province of Indostan . . . and the Fields of Guzerat look green in all the seasons of the Year . . ."<sup>2</sup> James Forbes, who was in the service of the East India Company from 1765 and knew India well, is even more emphatic, "If I were to point out the most beautiful part of India I ever saw, I should fix upon the province of Guzerat."<sup>3</sup>

The dominance of trade in the economy of medieval Gujarat, as opposed to mere agriculture as in other parts of India, resulted in the dominance of the trader and merchant over that of a feudal class in the growth of its



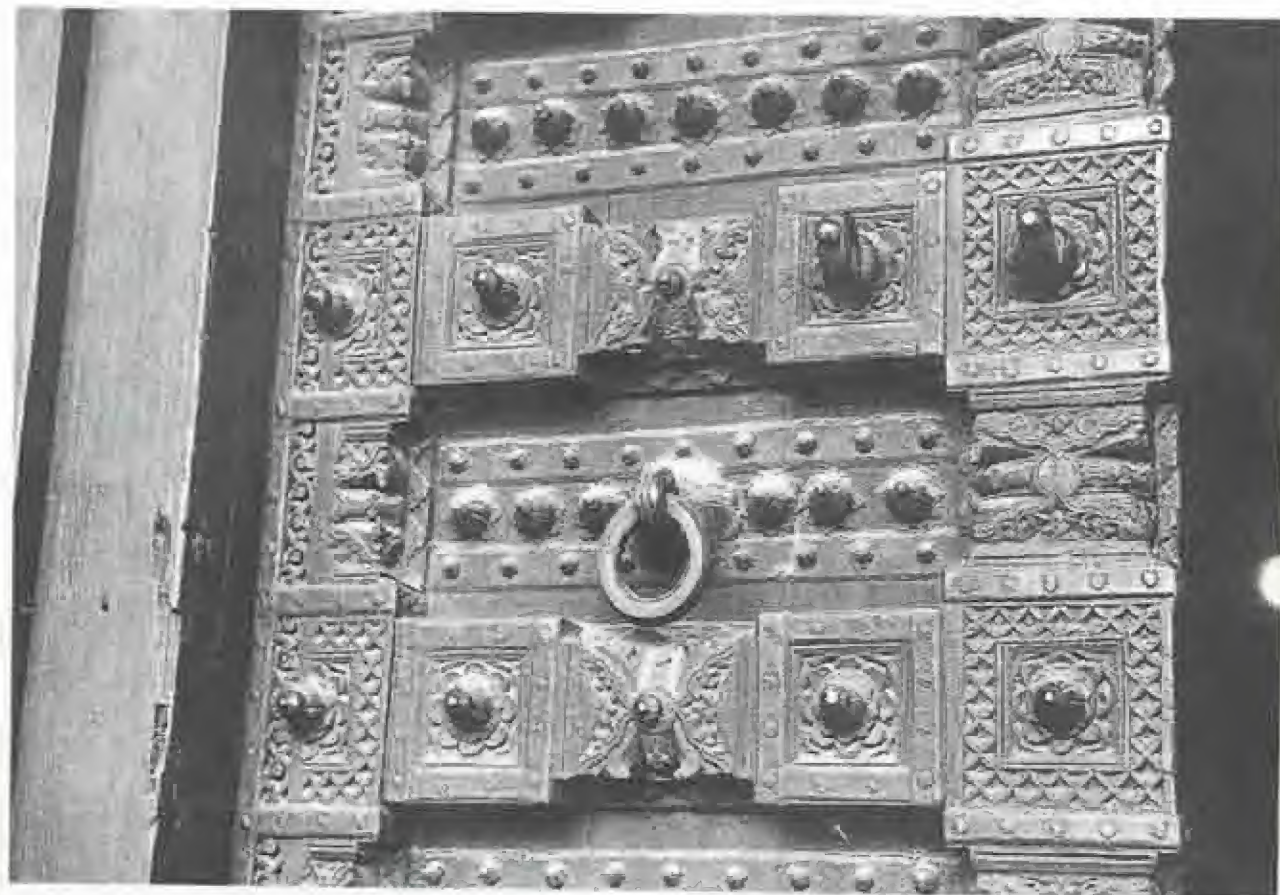


Fig.2. The ledges and battens of the shutters are carved with rosettes alternating with geometrical forms. In the centre of each flower is a large spike driven through the underlying planks.

culture. One aspect of this is seen in the fact that medieval Gujarat had a greater degree of urbanization compared to the rest of India<sup>1</sup>. It was in these urban centres that Gujarati culture and society developed, and which produced the model of arts and architecture followed throughout the province. The economic base of this culture was the large-scale manufacture of goods for trade, and this in turn stimulated the development of handicrafts. Among the most famous of these handicrafts was that of textiles. At Fustat (near Cairo) were found, during excavations, samples of Gujarati textiles dating from the 15th century A. D. Other skilled handicrafts were: stone carving, of which the Jain temples of Mount Abu are the most ornate examples; embroidery, which was executed even by village women; jewellery; and wood carving.

While all the major handicrafts of Gujarat have been extensively researched and publicised, that of wood carving has been largely neglected. This is not because they are in any way inferior to stone carving but because the reasons belong to a different order. Most Gujarati wood carving appears in domestic houses and domestic *haveli*-temples (private temples established in domestic houses called *havelis*), i. e. in the relative privacy of a domestic environment. As such, these carvings are not easily accessible to the outsider. Furthermore, the typical Gujarati house always formed part of a secluded settlement called a *khadki* guarded by a gateway, with its carved elevation facing inwards and only the plain rear visible from the road. Travellers would thus scarcely get a view of the wealth of decoration inside (for details





Fig.3-a. Typical column details. Twin columns from the front verandah of the house. The column shows three basic features, *kumbhi*, *stambha* and *bharni*. The *kumbhi* is a column base. It is carved in a manner so as to transform its square form into a circle to match the shaft. This has a projecting circlet. Above the base is *stambha* - a circular shaft and above the shaft is *bharni* - a capital.

of this kind of settlement pattern, see my book *Haveli*<sup>3</sup>). Another point is that the valuable wood carvings appear scattered widely in distant urban centres, hidden among a mass of mediocre and modern development. To find such remnants of surviving houses is not an easy task, and even having found them it is not certain that one would be able to study them,

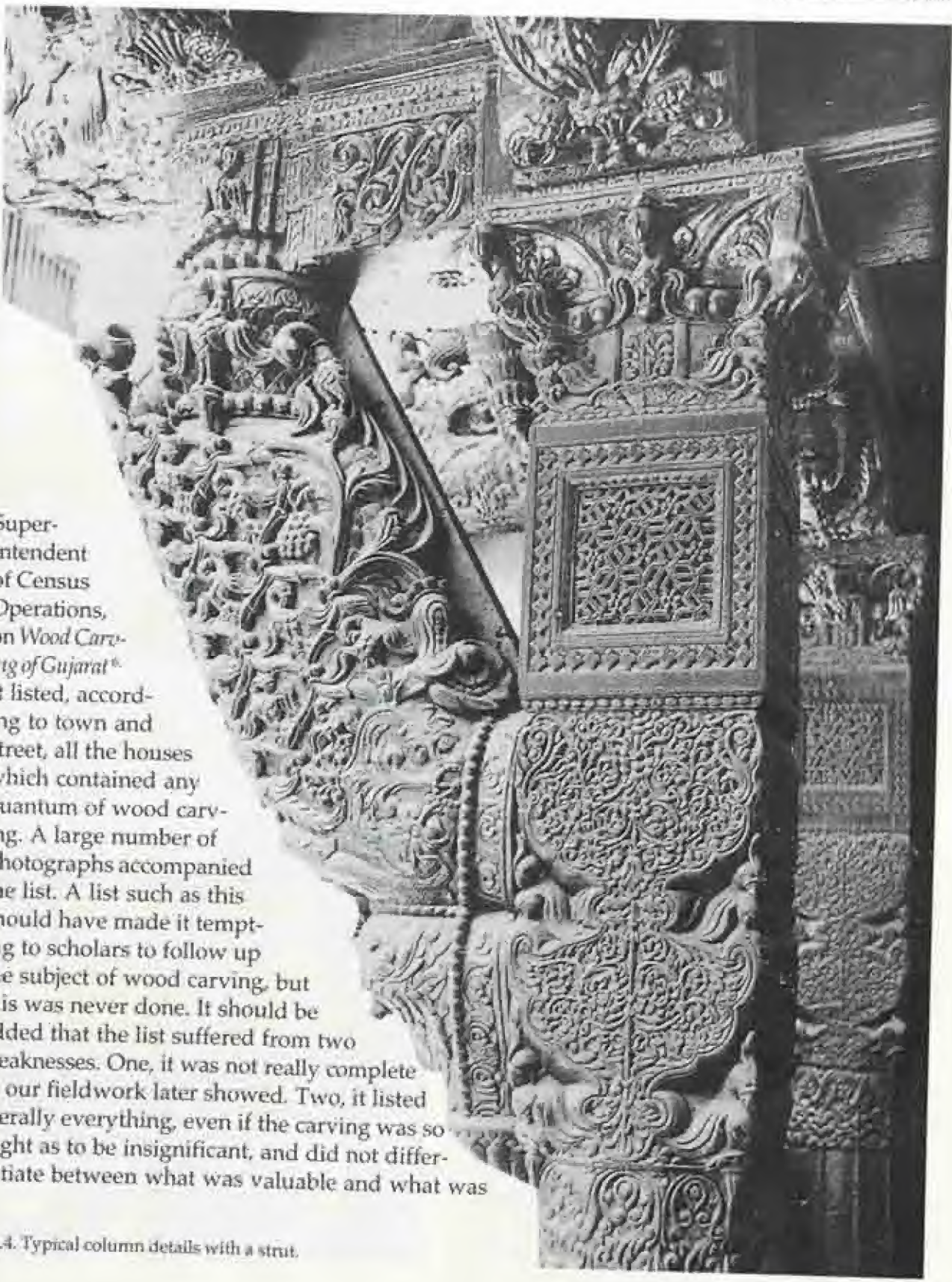
for these houses were still in active occupation. To work in such a house means working amidst a crowded joint family and intruding into their innermost privacy. All these are barriers which seem to have daunted most scholars from the undertaking.

In this connection it must be mentioned that during 1961 - Census operations, a list had indeed been prepared by Mr. R. K. Trivedi,

Fig.3-b. Close-up of same twin column (Figure 3). The space between the columns is filled in with a carved panel with a pattern of birds entwined with creepers. The columns' faces have carved profiles. The capital has stylised birds and between them, a flute player.







Superintendent of Census Operations, on *Wood Carving of Gujarat*<sup>6</sup>. It listed, according to town and street, all the houses which contained any quantum of wood carving. A large number of photographs accompanied the list. A list such as this should have made it tempting to scholars to follow up the subject of wood carving, but this was never done. It should be added that the list suffered from two weaknesses. One, it was not really complete as our fieldwork later showed. Two, it listed literally everything, even if the carving was so slight as to be insignificant, and did not differentiate between what was valuable and what was

Fig.4. Typical column details with a strut.





Fig.5. Details of capital of the columns.

not. The very extent of such a dry list was formidable enough to be repelling.

The primary aim is to study the architecture and its structural woodwork, and for this purpose an intensive search of wooden houses all over Gujarat was carried out. Having thus located the wooden houses, inevitably those having wood carving of quality were simultaneously identified and no fresh search was required.

The fieldwork covered every major town in Gujarat and also included smaller towns of historical importance or mentioned in the Census reports; some villages were also visited in order to discover the real extent of woodwork. It was found that woodwork was primarily an urban phenomenon but rich villages sought to emulate the urban houses and urban carvings whenever they could afford it. In towns, most of the surviving, richer, wooden houses are concentrated in the older, central

portions where, traditionally, the richer population of merchants and administrators lived. Regarding the manner in which fieldwork was done, how the age of houses was ascertained, the social and demographic background, the gathering of data, etc, it has been described in a brief summary here.

But before that it is necessary to take note of the Gujarati families in whose domestic midst these studies were carried out. Our team consisted of the author and three students of architecture of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Vadodara to which we were all attached. Throughout our trips we were fortunate in receiving a very warm welcome from the families concerned even though it meant spending the whole day with them and to some extent disturbing their domestic functions. Often a particular house had to be visited three days in succession, and family histories recorded. It is useful to explain some





Fig.6. Strut - Kapadvanj. Strut diagonally joins columns to extended arms of bracket - capitals, which in turn support cantilevers of upper floors.



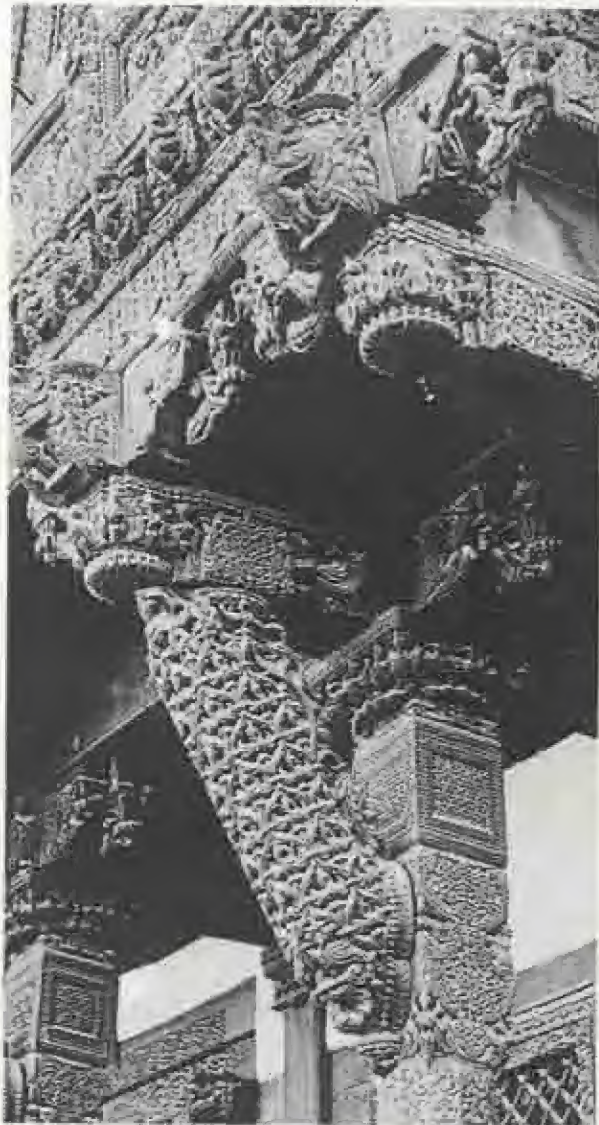


Fig.7. A typical columned verandah with huge struts carrying the projecting floor above. The first floor has the curvilinear balustrade and above a flat, carved panelled front with rosettes.

of the reasons for this welcome. Much of the success derived from the fact that the students who participated were themselves Gujaratis and who, by their department, soon established a rapport with the members of the family. Another reason was that the M. S. University of Vadodara had such a good reputation among the people that its name soon opened many doors to us. But finally, the most cogent

reason derives from the fact that Gujaratis have lived under the influence of commerce since centuries and inevitably that has meant an openness and receptivity to strangers. Gujarati women have no hesitation and awkwardness in dealing with visitors which characterises women of North India. Thus, we found no problems whatsoever in working within such households.

### General Background

Gujarat has historically been divided into three sub-divisions anciently called Anartta, Lata and Surashtra. Anartta corresponds to North and Central Gujarat

Fig.7-a. Twin struts at the entrance of the door. They are of same length. They are carved in the typical minute floral pattern.





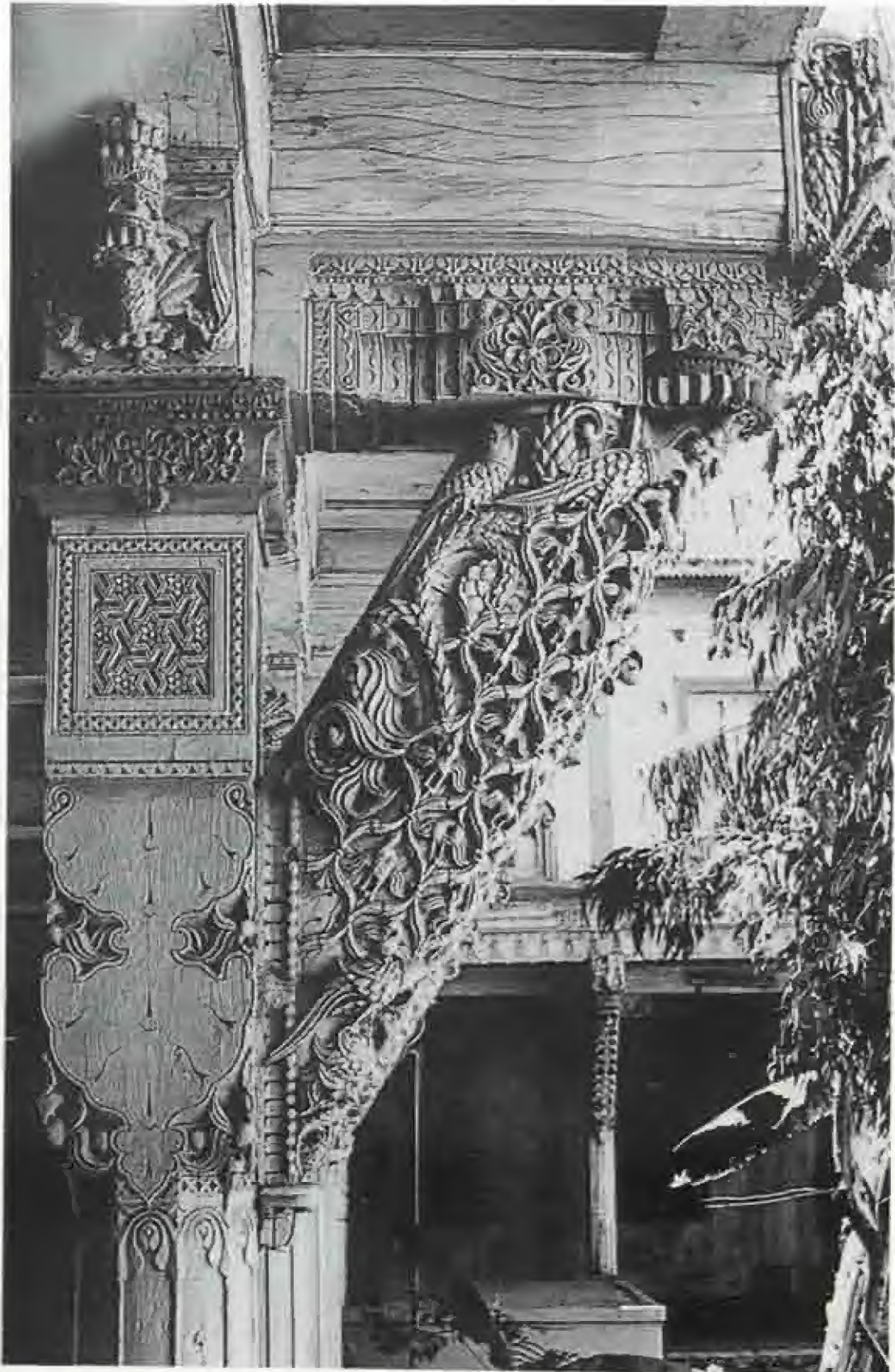




Fig.7-b. One of the richly carved struts, supporting the beam-end and projecting floor above. The whole structural system of column, capital, bracket-capital, beams, struts are clearly visible here. The bracket capital has the characteristic droplet, and the beam-end has a floral pattern. The strut itself combines many themes in baroque-like profusion. This include a parrot, rich floral scrolls etc (facing page).

Fig.8-a. Frontal view of a strut showing an armed retainer holding a sword and shield, dressed in Rajasthani costume. The scattered animals and birds appear incongruous and seem to indicate a deterioration of the art (right).



Fig.8-b. Strut - Gaekwad Palace, Patan. This shows the most complex design which is known as figural strut. Here divine *Vidyadhara* is holding a musical instrument.





Fig.9 Strut - Narsinhaji temple, Baroda. This shows an elephant, whose large figure fully occupies the strut. The concept of the figural strut appeared during 1st century A.D. This had much of a Greek influence.

model which the other areas sought to emulate. All the old, historical capitals of Gujarat were situated here: Anarttapur, Anahillapur (today called Patan), Ahmedabad and Champaner. The largest and most prosperous towns are located in it: Ahmedabad, Baroda, Kapadvanj, Cambay, Dabhoi, Patan, Siddhapur, Broach, etc. North Gujarat also has the maximum of woodwork both in quantity and quality.

Saurashtra, poor in soil and climate, has always been less developed, with a major part of its population consisting of nomadic herders. Curiously, Saurashtra has at the same time been the most feudal part of Gujarat with hundreds of local chieftains ruling over small territories in a condition of persistent rivalry. The lack of commercialisation and urbanisation is reflected in the sphere of architecture where there was less display of wealth in the form of carvings. Wood carving was scarce because of the scarcity of the raw material, while even where stone was used, it was of a friable nature which precluded much carving. On the other hand, Saurashtra, being closest to Europe and West Asia, seems to have come under far greater foreign influence and this is particularly noticeable in the style of its carvings.

South Gujarat is even today overwhelmingly tribal. It is the poorest part of Gujarat, with little development of commerce, agriculture or urbanisation, and correspondingly poorest in its architecture and carvings.

A comparative study of the architecture in these three sub-divisions reveals some interesting features with cage like timbers. The house-plans in the three sub-divisions show characteristic differences derived from differing origins and life-styles, but when it comes

(which we have here combined into North Gujarat, i. e. territory north of the river Narmada); Lata corresponds to South Gujarat, i. e. territory south of the Narmada river; Surashtra is modern Saurashtra including Kutch, which was called Kathiawar in Muslim times. Each of these three sub-divisions had from early times differing characteristics determined by varying factors.

North Gujarat has always been the most productive and dominant part of the province; it has produced the society and culture which came to be called 'Gujarati' and served as the



Fig.9-a. This strut has a mythical beast called a *Vynla* or *Sardula*: partly lion, partly elephant and partly bird.

to the carpentry they all show remarkable affinities. This clearly indicates that the carpentry had one original source, and that was North Gujarat, i. e. it was craftsmen from North Gujarat who produced the style and technique of woodwork which spread to the whole province.

One important question which arises regarding woodwork is the following: why was wood used when the rest of India had largely shifted to the exclusive use of brick or stone? It is not as if Gujarat had ever been richly endowed with structural timber, making it the convenient material for construction. The reverse was the case. Yet, wood continued to be extensively used in construction in conjunction with brick or stone right up to the end of the 19th century A. D., and this wood was used not merely for roofing or for decoration but as an essential part of the load-bearing structure of the house. The typical Gujarati house employed wooden members as bonding-timbers embedded horizontally within the masonry walls. These bonding-timbers tied in with the frames of doors and windows, and the whole acted as a kind of 'cage' which held the house together. In North and South Gujarat, there were additional vertical members—technically called attached columns—which were embedded within walls, even at the corners, thus producing a two-way 'cage' or framework of wood. This peculiar structural technique gave to the woodwork a

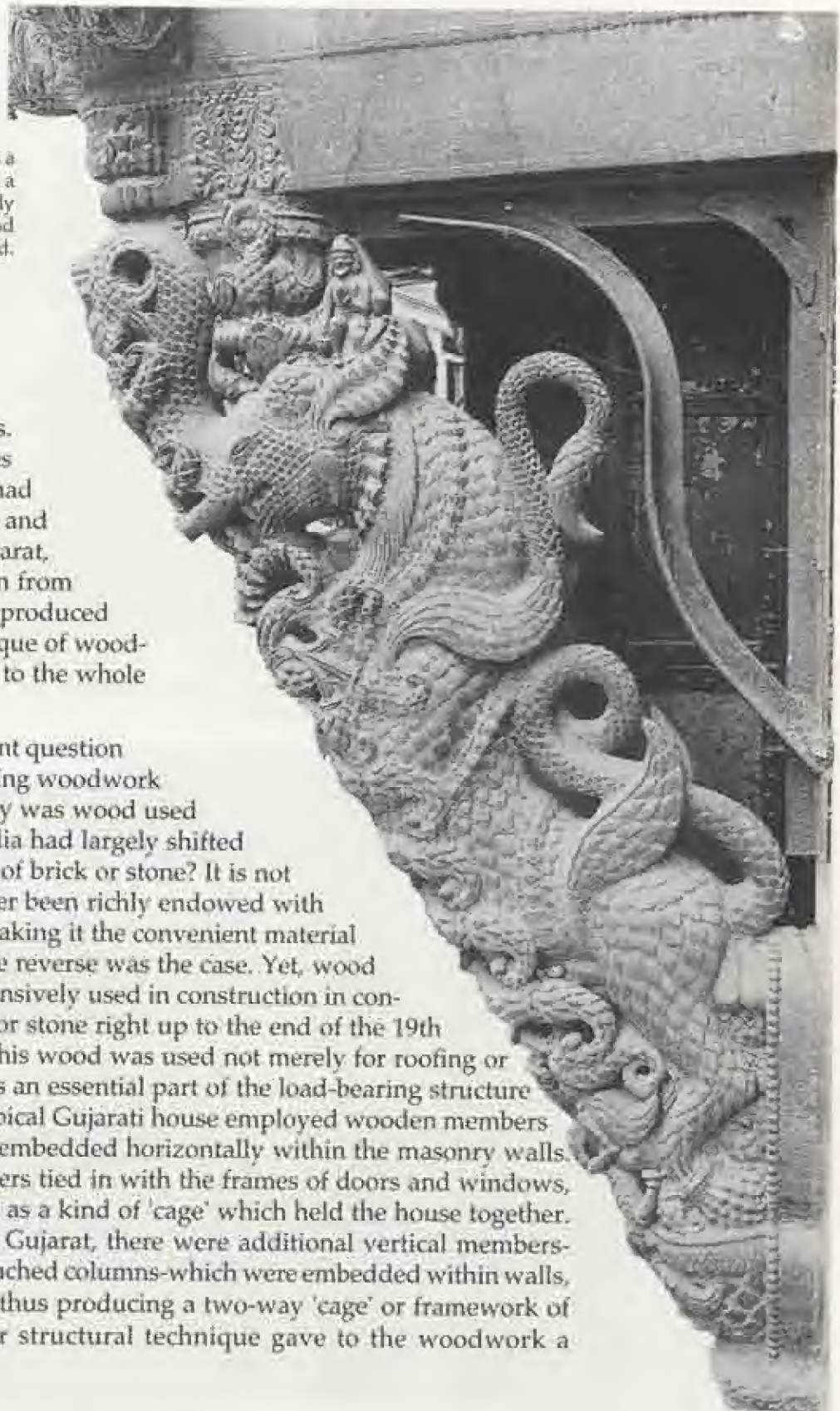






Fig.10. View of the balustrade forming part of the *haveli* elevation. The part of carving was done when the surface was still flat. It has parrots entwined with potted plants.

Fig.11. Partial view of front woodwork on and below the balustrade. The curvilinear balustrade with two carved side-pieces, below it a carved frieze and a row of animal-heads followed by a carved beam.

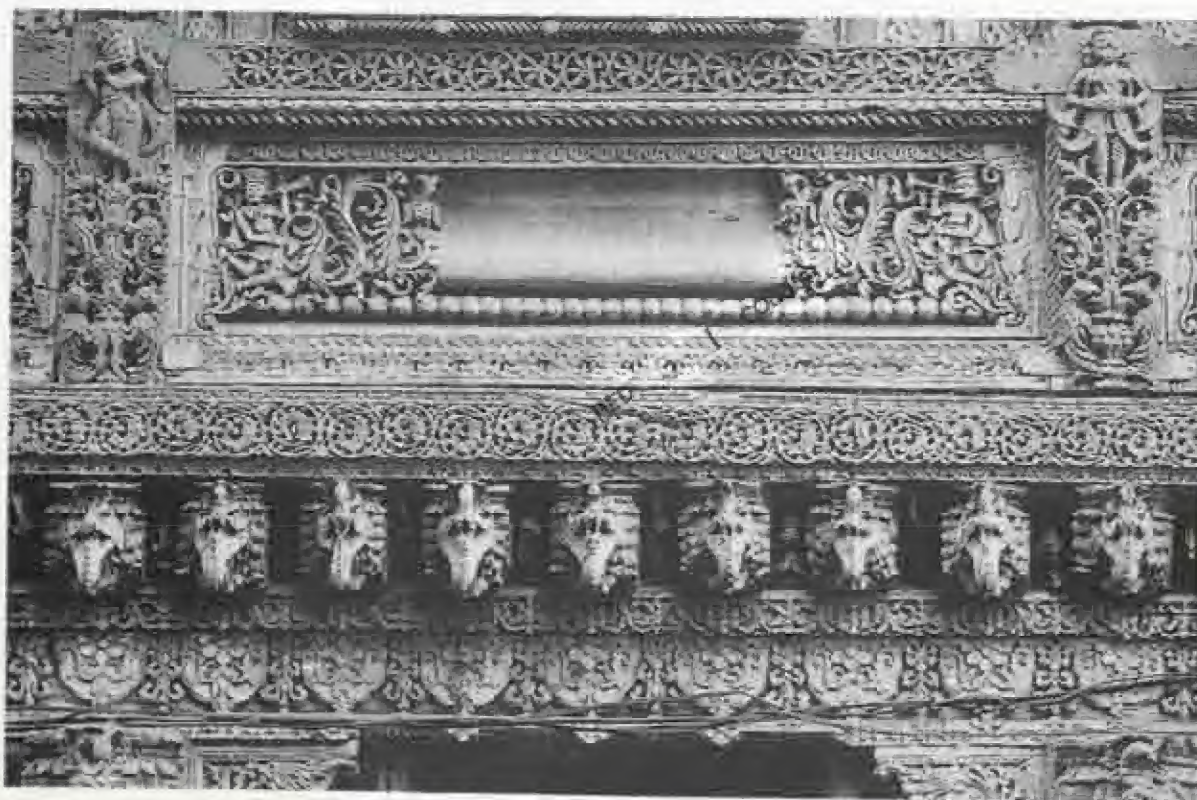






Fig.12. (above) Balcony : The surface is carved with very refined geometric and floral patterns. The central panel shows cypresses and plants. Fig.13 (bottom left) and Fig. 13 a (bottom right). Human figures carved on balustrade. They are standing on lotus flowers.





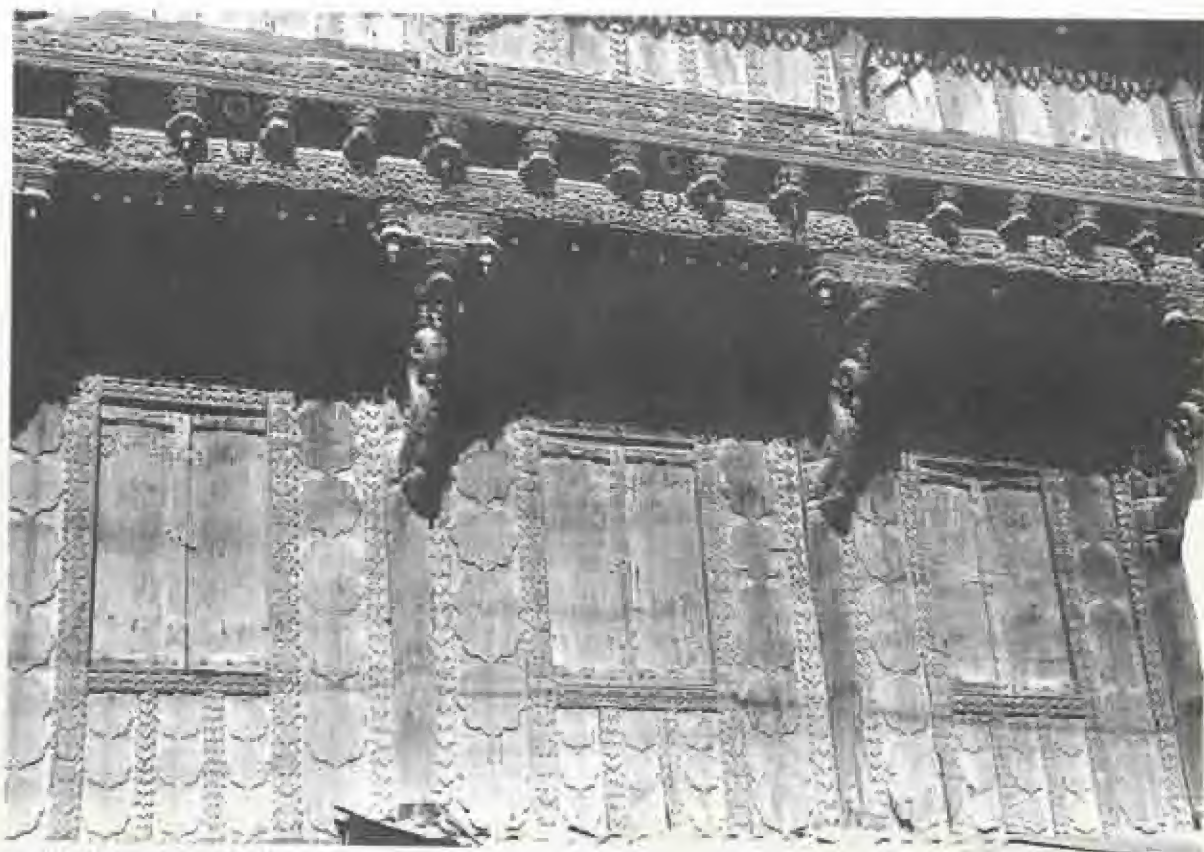


Fig.14. House front (Muslim). Patan. There is a long running balcony supported by pillars.

dominant visual role in the architecture, and hence its designations as "wooden architecture".

Even today, in some of the old, relatively undisturbed towns of Gujarat, some 80 % of the inhabitants reside in such wooden houses. The best preserved of such towns where woodwork can be seen in almost pristine condition are: Kapadvanj, Siddhapur, Umreth, Patan, some inner cores of Ahmedabad, parts of Vadodara, Bharuch, Dholka, Khambhat; Dabhoi. What is striking is that two old European factories built at Surat and Bharuch, while having a European plan and details, still retained the traditional Gujarati timber-bonding, thus proving the strength of the tradition.

The reason why timber was used in this manner was to give structural stability to the multi - storeyed houses which arose due to pressure on urban space. The masonry walls of

Gujarati houses used either of the two materials. In North and South Gujarat this material was brick, but the brick was of a small size cemented together with mud mortar. In Saurashtra the material was often stone, but this stone was of such a poor quality that it alone did not possess adequate resistance to point loads. In both materials the weight of heavy beams carrying ceilings and roofs and resting upon masonry was liable to produce cracks in the latter. In

Fig.15. A front with the whole surface including the frames, is carved with a minutely incised floral pattern forming a closed mesh (facing page).

Fig.16. The frontage of this *haveli* is one of the richest in Gujarat. This is one of the windows with railings of turned wood, a carved, panelled front, a curvilinear balustrade and a row of elephant heads (page 16).

Fig.17-a. A full view of the window in the frontage of the house. The shutters are carved with spreading plants. The inner frame shows rosettes (page 17).

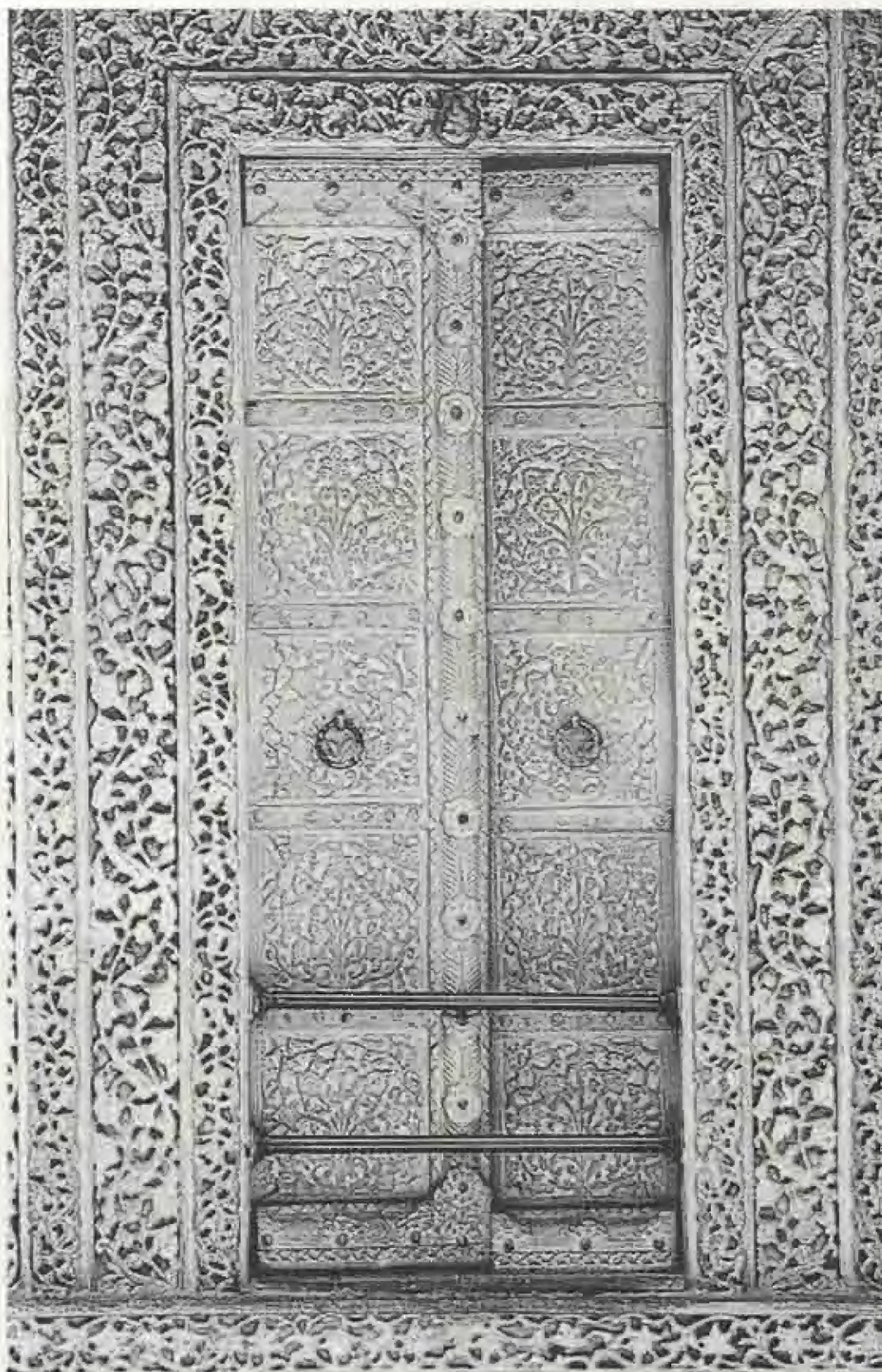














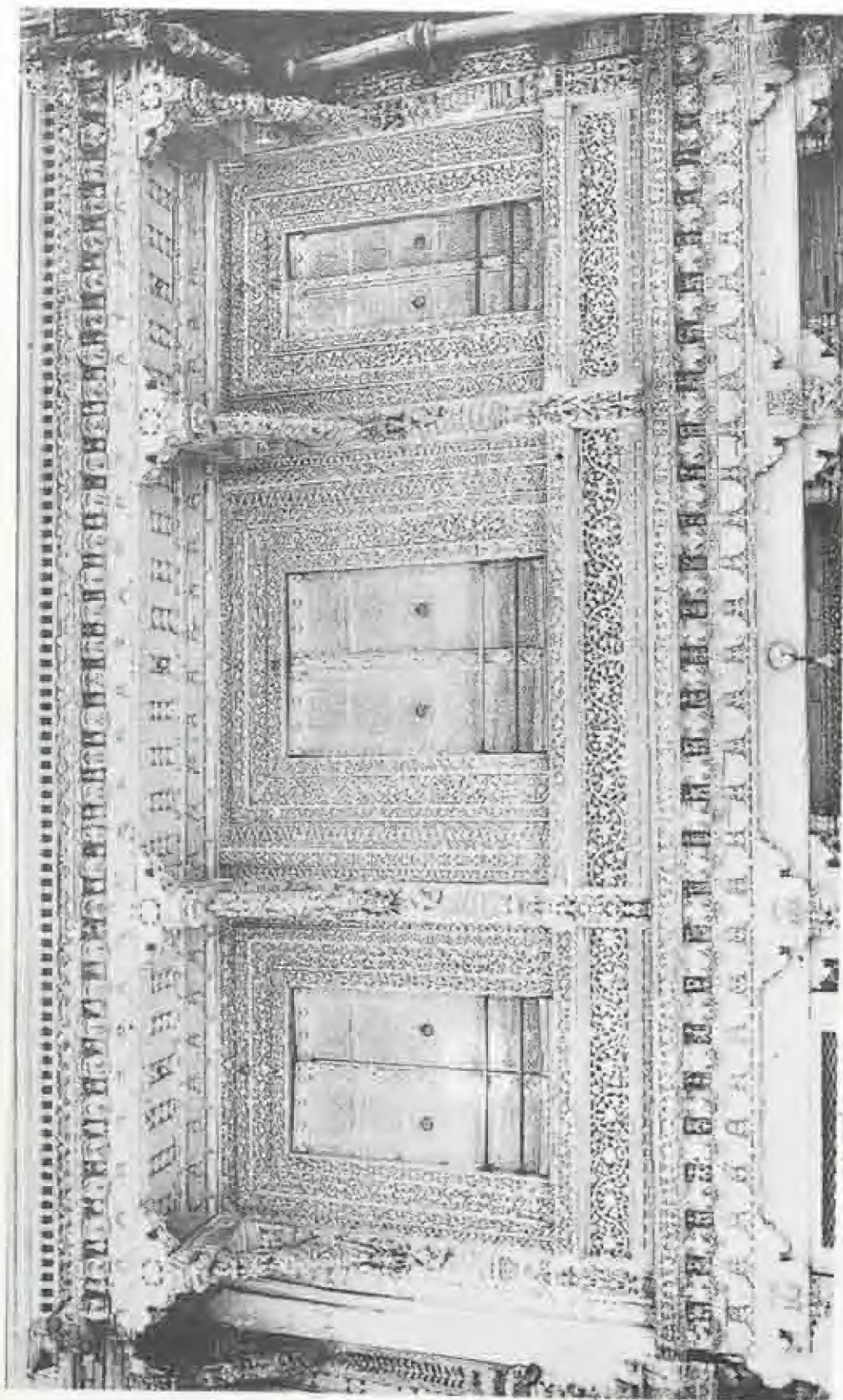


Fig. 17-b. The frontage shows details of finer carvings. The balustrade has a creeper emerging from the centre and spreading onwards in a meander. The uprights carry floral patterns and small images. The panelled front has the typically minute floral pattern borrowed from block printing. The posts have cypresses.



North India the cementing material was not mud mortar but lime mortar and that made all the difference in the case of brick; whereas the stone which was available was of a quality which was much superior to that of Gujarat. The reason why lime mortar was rarely used in Gujarat is a topic too complex to discuss here. What the Gujarati craftsman did, to overcome the weakness of the masonry wall, was to introduce bonding-timbers as a kind of reinforcement around the building, and these placed horizontally prevented vertical cracks. In other words, the introduction of timber was dictated by a structural necessity. Now, this technique was not a Gujarati invention: it appears in the architecture of West Asia from very ancient times and must have been borrowed from that region.

The relative scarcity of structural timber within Gujarat was made good by large imports by sea from places such as Daman, Malabar and even Burma. In all such cases the wood imported was teak. It was the existence of ports in Gujarat and the sea-faring tradition which made such imports feasible.

Regarding the qualities of teak, these are described as follows, " Teak owes its value chiefly to its great durability ... ascribed to the fact that it contains a large quantity of fluid resinous matter, which fills up the pores and resists the action of water ... mention may be made of the fact that the great umbrella over the H-tee in the Karli cave ( made of teak ) is still in existence, though it is most probably at least two thousand years old ... The oil in the wood prevents its getting water-logged, and seems also to safeguard it against weevils and other timber-boring insects. It is specially valued because it does not rust the iron with which it is worked up."<sup>7</sup> And further, " It is moderately hard, exceedingly durable and strong, does not split, crack, warp, shrink or alter its shape when once seasoned ... "<sup>8</sup> It should be added that being close-grained, teak is an ideal material for carving.



Fig.18. A window with wooden grill carved in a very intricate manner. The bars are placed horizontally and vertically, fitting into prepared rebates and nailed together.

It was noticed during fieldwork that the teak wood used had been so well seasoned that beams, over 150 years old, showed no signs of deflection. Now, one of the techniques of seasoning mentioned by British writers was 'girdling'. In this, a deep notch was cut all around the trunk some distance above the ground since this prevented nutrients from rising, the tree would slowly die while still standing. It was then automatically seasoned. A process such as this took time and it was obvious that it could only be carried out in relatively peaceful and organised areas. But it was precisely in forested areas, from where timber was available, that tribals dominated and numerous historical references show that these tribals were at all times very turbulent, at least within Gujarat. That would partly explain why timber had to be brought from so far afield.

Once the timber was landed at various



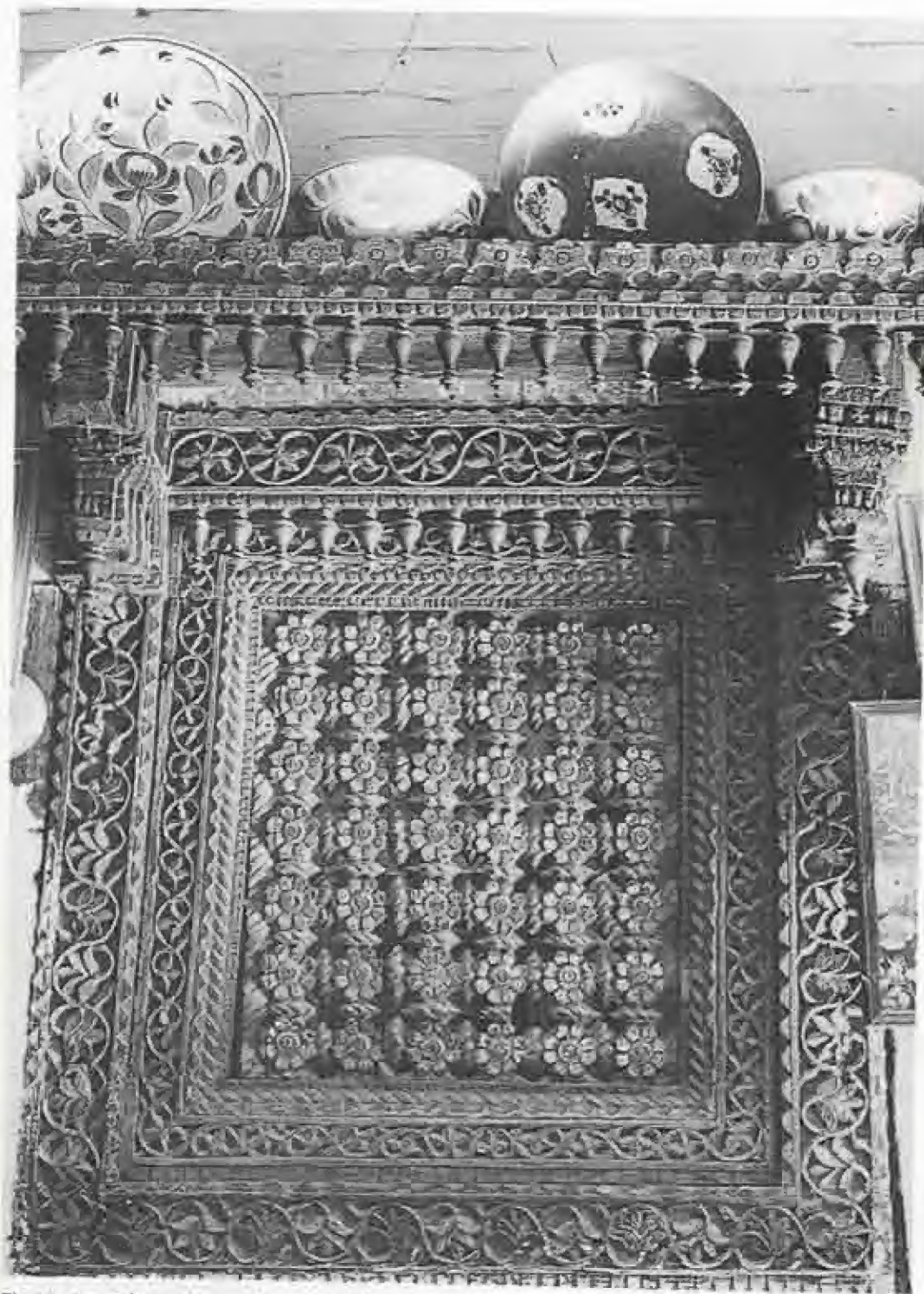


Fig.19. A window with wooden grill with vertical and horizontal bars. Small rosettes are nailed onto junctions of the bars, producing very rich appearance.



ports, it then had to be transported by land-carriage to urban centres inland where the chief demand existed. Land-carriage meant the bullock-cart, and its technical load-bearing capacity determined the size of timber which could be transported. Field observations showed that in general the timber used in architecture was of a relatively small size, being rarely over 550 cm. in length. This limitation on size naturally had its effect on the architecture: room spans were limited by the spans of available beams, i. e. to depths of about 5 meters. While the lengths of rooms could be much greater, the depths were always restricted to such short spans. Carved wooden parts also had the same limitations of size.

Regarding the artisans who worked in wood, there are a number of interesting points. Sir George Watt, an expert on Indian handicrafts organised the great exhibition of Indian art at Delhi in 1903, wrote that wood carvers and stone carvers once belonged to the same caste. As will be shown later, this conclusion may not be correct. The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency of 1901 (Gujarat was then still part of that Presidency) describes that castes of carpenters, known in Gujarati as *suthars*. It lists six sub-divisions of *suthars*: Ahir, Gujar, Mevada, Pancholi, Marvadi and Vaish. The Pancholi, also called Panchal, is said to be a low caste. The Marvadi *suthars* claim to have originally been Rajputs and have six sub-groups: Bhati, Chohan, Rathod, Solanki, etc. Now, these latter names are well known Rajput clan names and what they indicate is that the carpenters attached to these clans adopted the names in order to identify themselves. The generic designation of Marvadi clearly proves that they once inhabited the southern part of Rajasthan known as Marvad, i. e. it is a territorial designation, sub-divided into clans.

The Ahirs (originally a herding group belonging to Saurashtra) also have six sub-

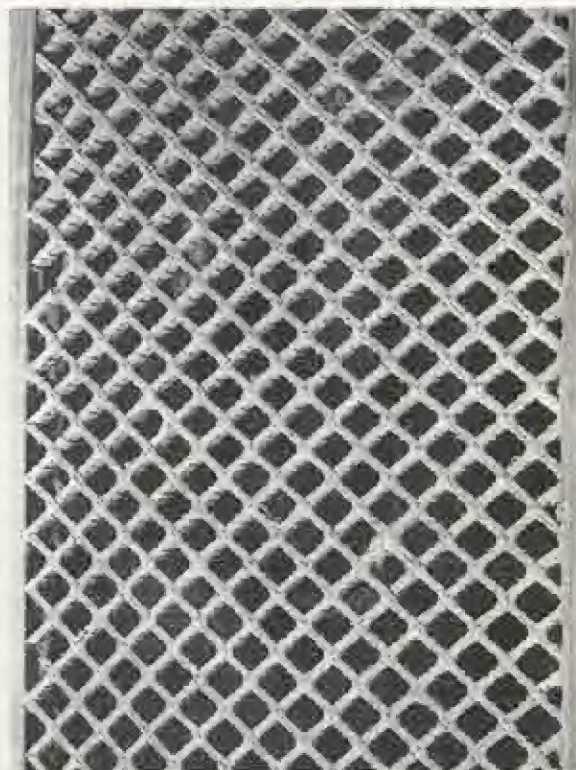


Fig. 20. Details of trellised screen. This kind of fretwork has an uncertain source and is not typical of Gujarat.

groups: Avadya, Bhala, Chohan, etc., and claim to be Kshatriyas. The claim is similar to that of the Rajput *suthars*. The Gujar *suthars* say that they were both stonemasons and carpenters. The Mevadas obviously took their name from northern Rajasthan known as Marvad, i. e. again a territorial name. The term Vaish is derived from Vaishya, which in medieval times meant a *Baniya* or trader.<sup>9</sup> It will be seen from this description that the *suthars* do not constitute a homogenous caste; the profession has drawn groups from varying other occupations and they have retained their separate identities, merely collectively calling themselves *suthars* to designate their profession.

The word *suthar* is derived from Sanskrit *sutraadhara* and originally meant one who worked by 'holding the string', that is to say, he set out the measurements in architecture. Since ancient architecture in India was predominantly in



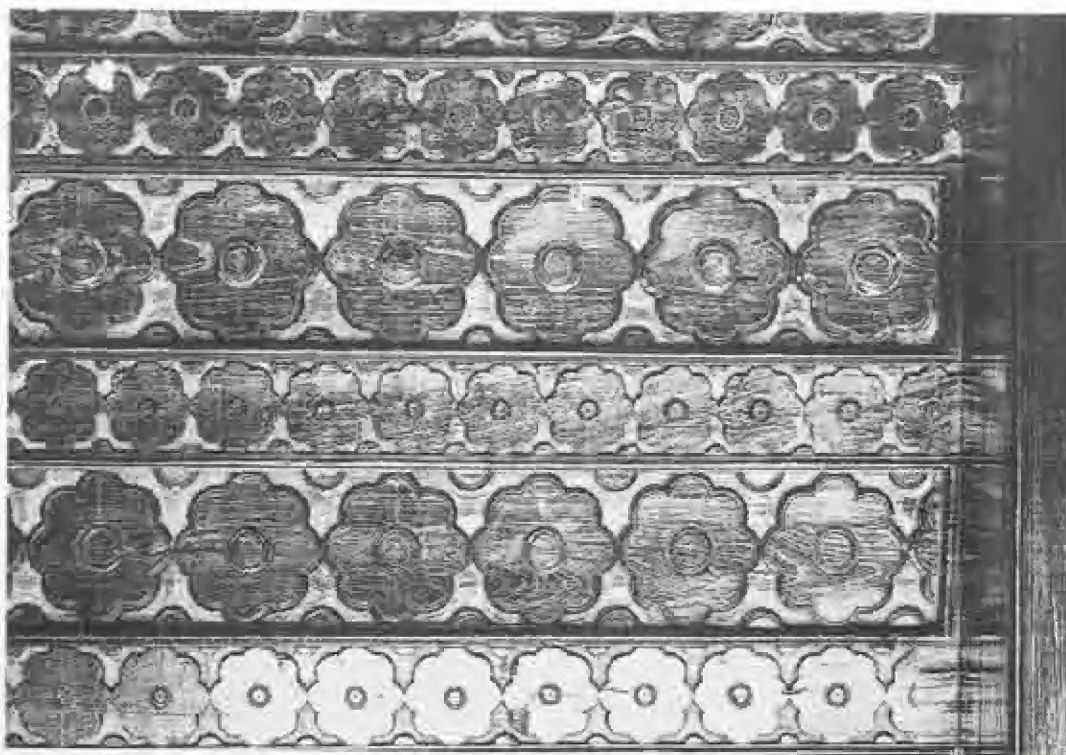


Fig.21. The carved ceiling with a row of joists. The close-fitting planks are placed horizontally. Each plank is given an undulating outline which fitted into the undulations of its neighbour.

Fig.22. Part detail of the carved ceiling in the ground floor *divankhama*. The flat pattern is floral/geometric with a more intricately carved border. The ceiling resembles carpet design.

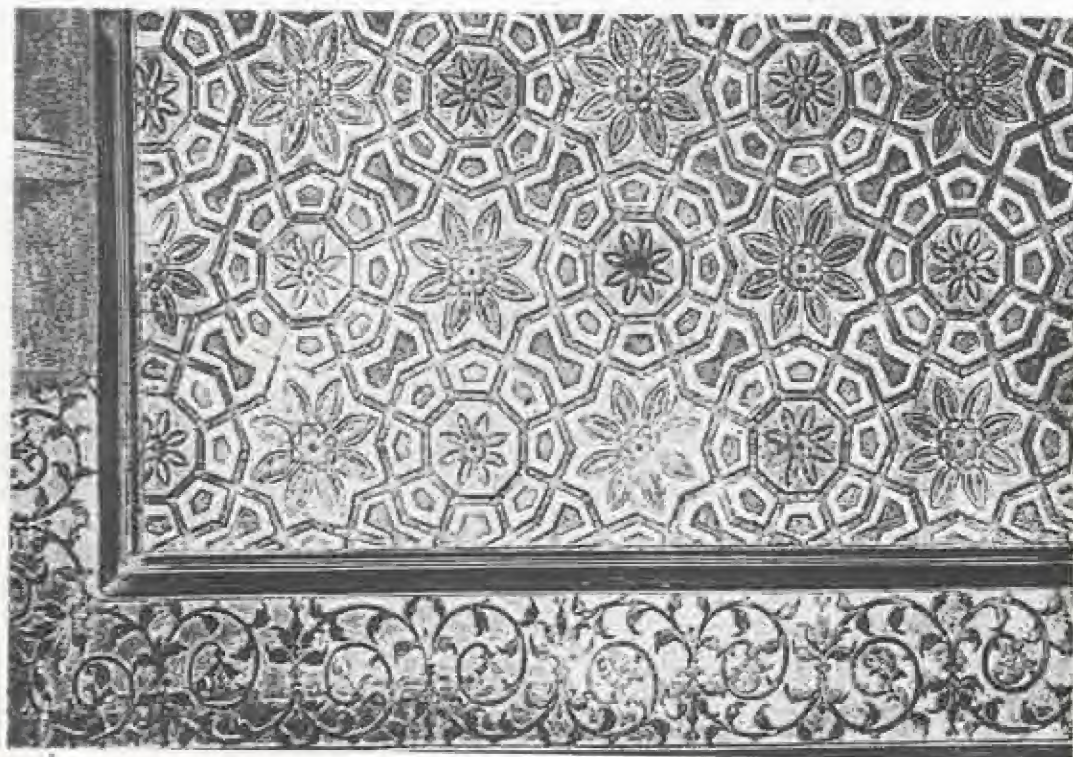










Fig.24. This is the interior of a typical Muslim house with numerous wall-niches of carved wood, the continuous shelf above, displaying china-ware, a bed which serves as a seat during the day and as sleeping bed at night. The columns are typically Gujarati.

wood, it automatically meant that the *sutradhar* was a carpenter.

The Gazetteer mentions that among the sub-groups of carpenters, the Gujar or Gajjar occupied a special position because they alone knew the rules of the ancient *shilp shastra* texts on art and architecture. It was the Gajjar who drew the rough plan of the house, arranged to buy the wood, and assisted in the rituals of housebuilding. It is interesting to find that among the six carpenter sub-divisions, it is the Gajjar or Gujar who played the dominant role in the architecture in wood, for it is our

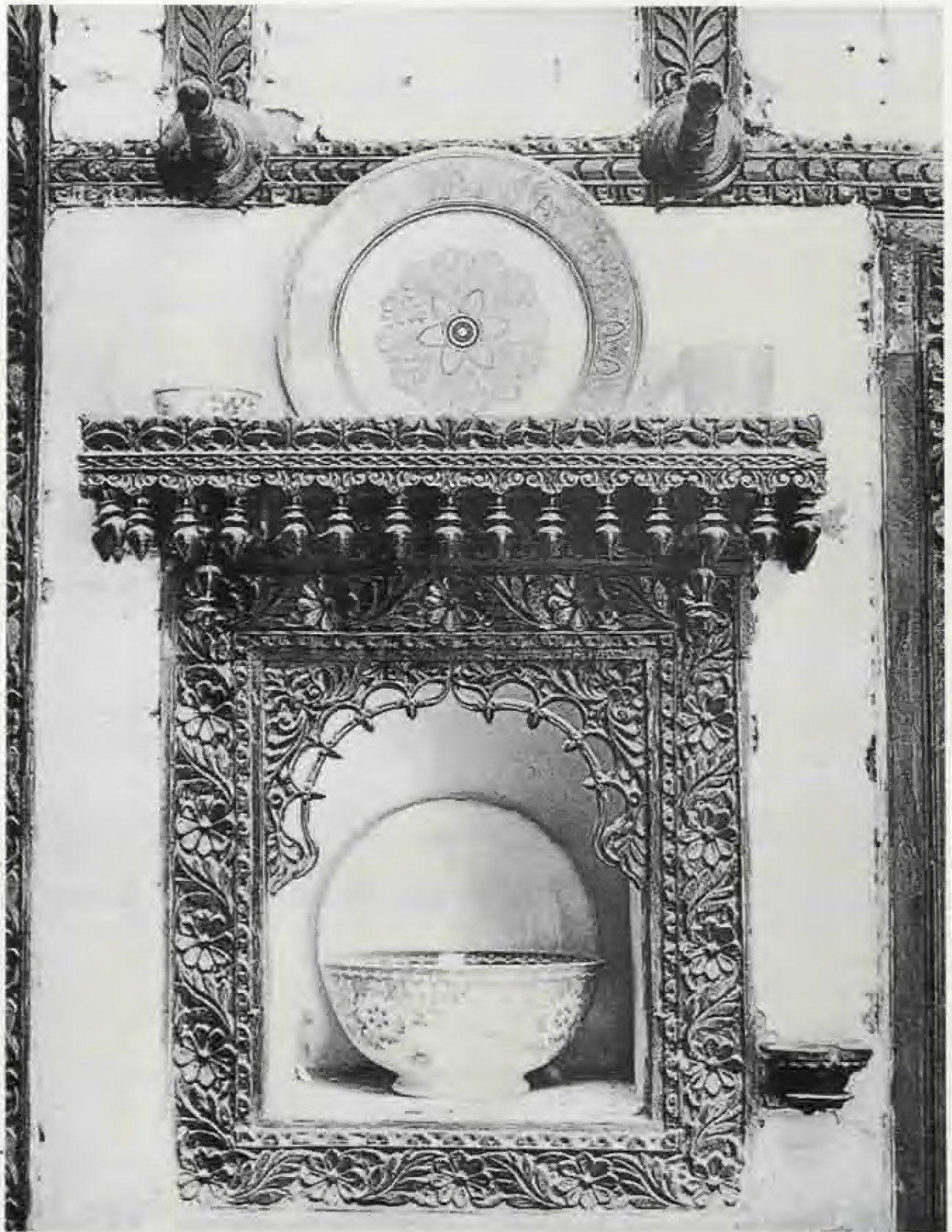
proposition that the wooden technique was brought into Gujarat by the tribe of ancient Gurjars who also gave the name to the province of Gujarat.

So far as Gujarat is concerned, the traditional temple builders and stone carvers were known as Sompuras. They were the ones who built the famous temple at Somnath in Saurashtra. But the designation 'Sompura' merely indicates that they adopted this title after having built this prestigious temple and acquired fame. It discloses nothing about their original caste which could have been any one

Fig.23. A typical flat carved ceiling. The carved pieces are nailed onto a background of planks. This technique, probably is of Islamic origin. The white flowers against the dark background look like pieces of ivory (previous page).

Fig.25. A wall niche in Muslim house. It is square with carved front with a built-in arch, a pierced trefoils and running shelf overhead. The shelf and niche, both are used for keeping articles (facing page).







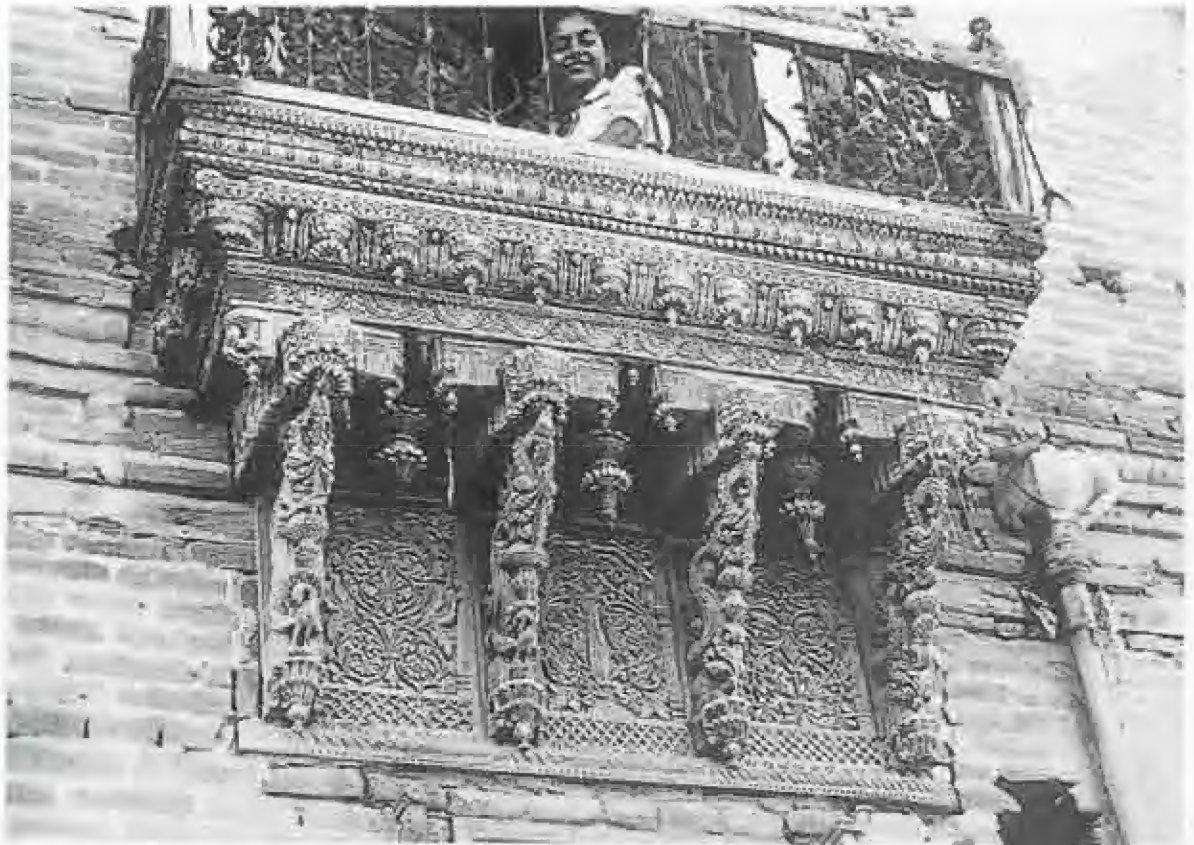


Fig. 26. An elegant balcony of North Gujarat. The columns and the supporting woodwork are original. The struts are fixed to a wall-plate embedded in the wall.

of the six main sub-divisions listed above. At any rate, they appear to be quite distinct from wood carvers. So to say, as does George Watt, that they all once formed a single caste, is an over-simplification.

There is yet another group which was once actively engaged in wood carving, albeit of a quite different kind. In textile manufacture, there is a technique according to which designs are carved on to small wooden blocks which, upon being coated with a dye, are impressed by hand upon the material to produce printed cloth. There must, therefore, have existed whole groups or people engaged in carving such wooden blocks, but of their origins and caste no notice has been taken.

It is significant that in Gujarat no Muslim carpenters are named. In the sphere of

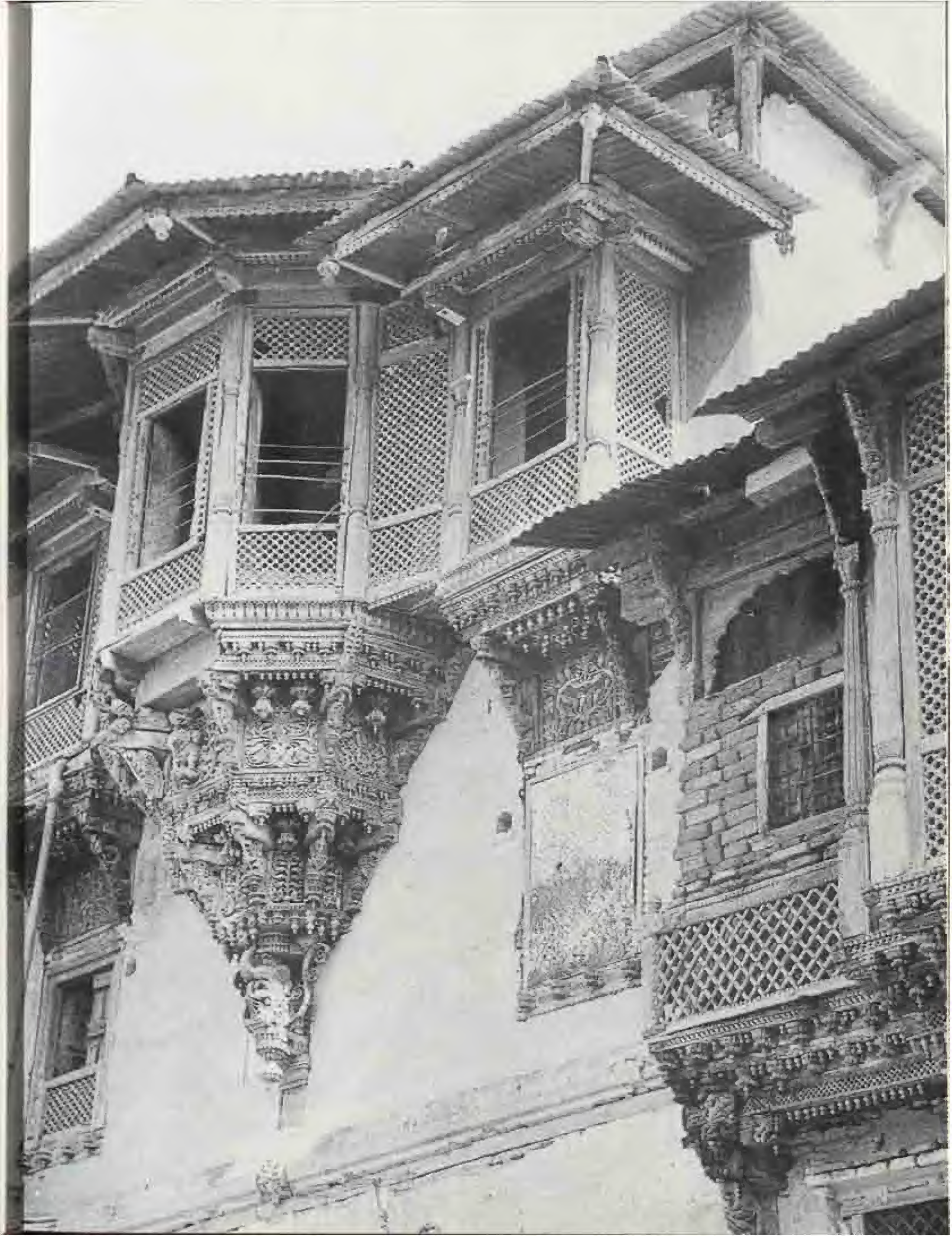
architecture and woodwork, Hindu and Jain artisans were obviously the dominant group. This dominance can be seen also from the fact that even in purely Muslim buildings such as the numerous tombs and mosques, it is Hindu or Jain influences which predominate, both in structural techniques and carvings.

Fig. 27. *Jharokha* of a Palace, Palanpur. This has two ranges of cantilever starting from a single supporting element at the bottom and rising upwards in expanding tiers. Each tier has ring of struts. The panels between the struts show floral patterns. There are also rows of pendants and droplets (facing page).

Fig. 28-a. A series of *Jharokhas* in the palace of Nawab of Palanpur. Here the central *Jharokha* has one tier of cantilever with a storey on it (page 28).

Fig. 28-b. This *Jharokha* has been constructed on two tiers of struts. The lower struts are fixed to a wall-plate embedded in the wall, while the struts of upper tier are projected on them. The *Jharokha* has pierced screens and wooden pendants on both the tiers (page 29).

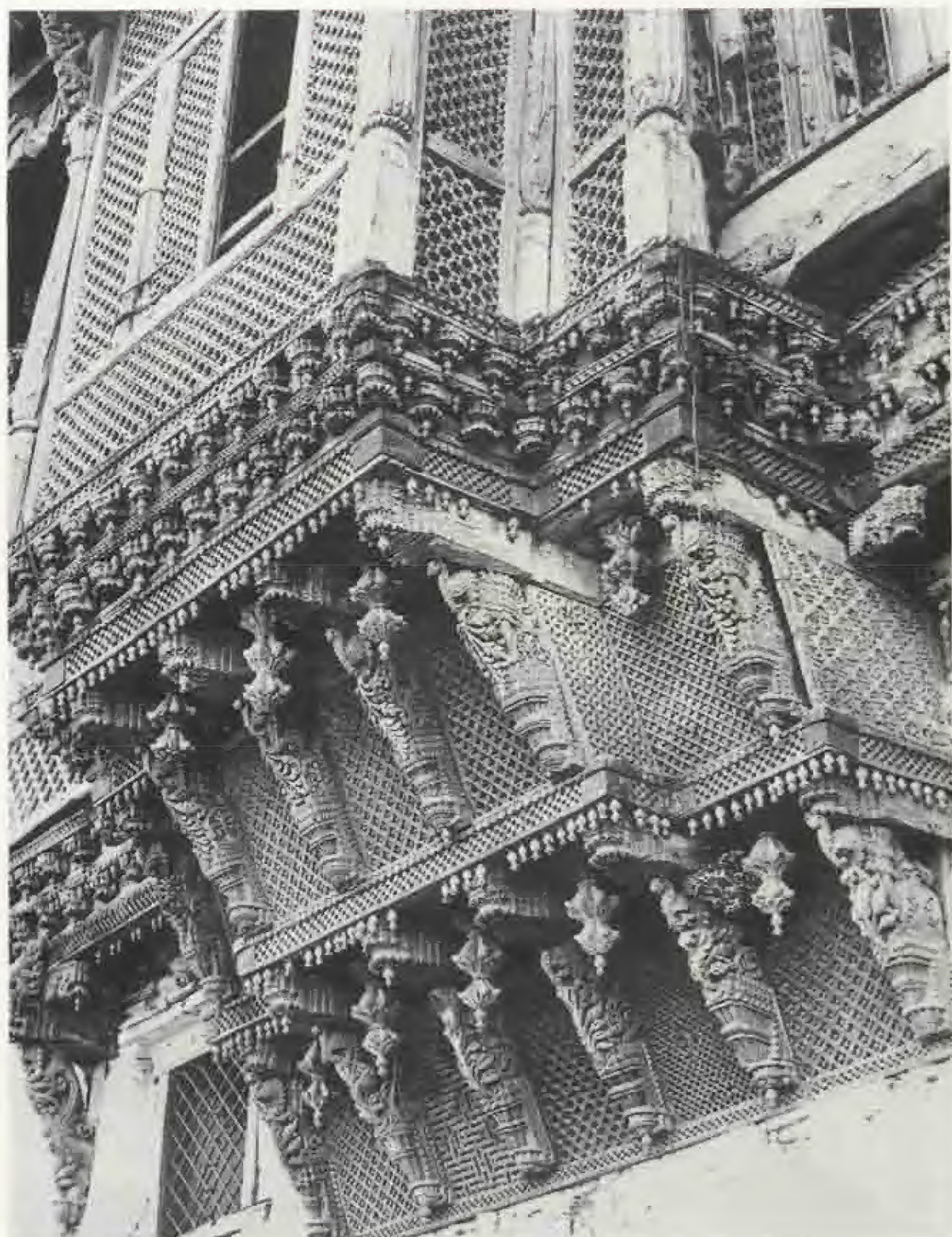














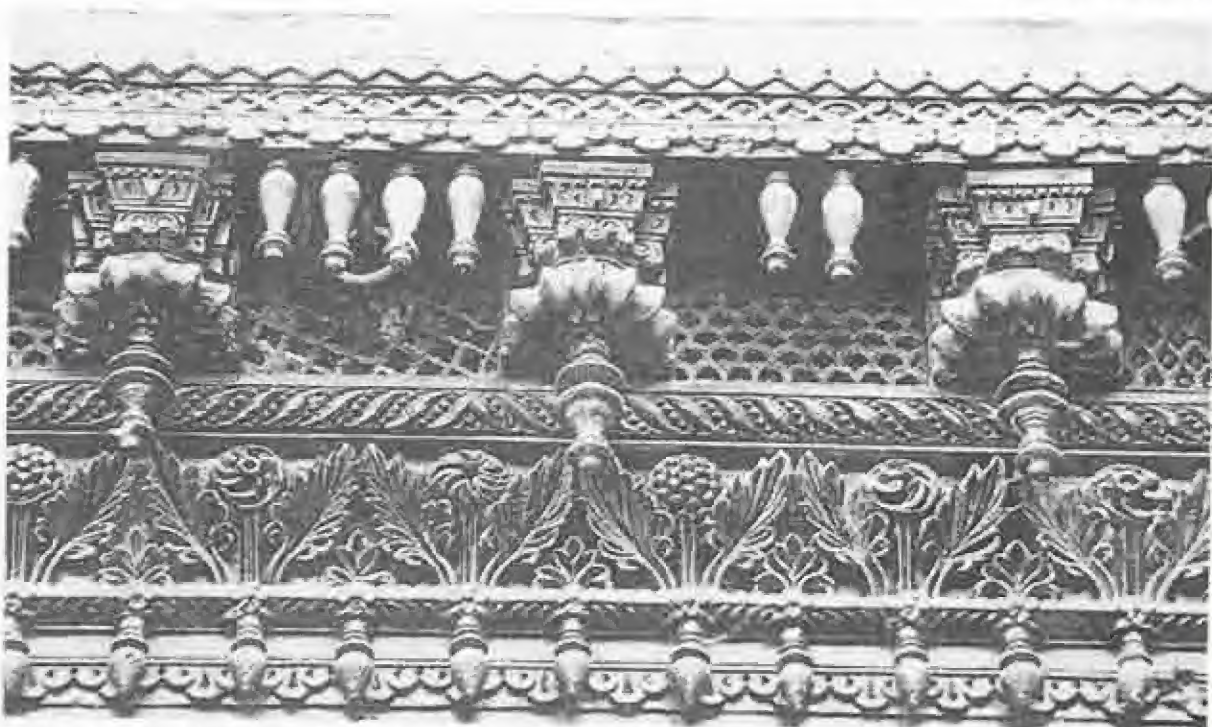


Fig.29. A *jharukha* with pierced wooden screen and tiny pendants. These pendants are suspended with tiny metal hooks. They sway with the breeze.

Fig.30. The flat section of a pillar bears two profiles originally meant for struts. The struts are missing - the surface is lightly curved and the corner floral spray is masterly done.

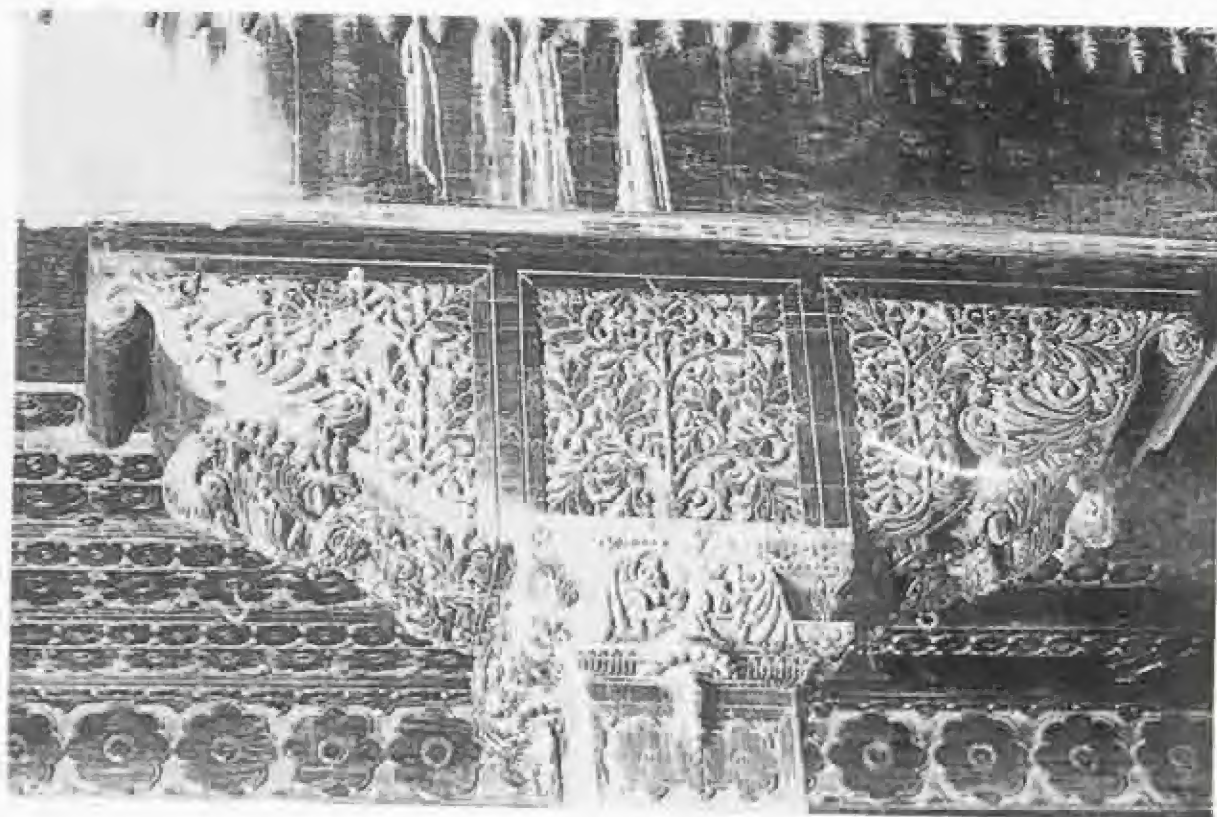






Fig.31. A normal column shaft changes from a circular cross-section to the square one at the upper end.

### Age and Extent of Woodwork

Regarding the age of surviving woodwork, the situations are rendered difficult due to the paucity of records. None of the families has maintained historical records in any systematic manner; some have stray documents which are useful, but they do not disclose when the houses were constructed. The histories of the times, written for rulers, are full of royal and political events, and only occasionally mention civilian names. Even when these are mentioned, in most cases their houses have

disappeared. However, we were fortunate in discovering certain historically known families whose dwellings were intact at the moment we visited them (they are now gone), so that these give a basic date line by which they, and others, can be dated. It should be added that the Census report mentioned earlier also gives dates of houses listed, but they are generally very rough approximations.

Many families, while possessing no history, did remember the number of generations before which the house was built, so that an approximate date could be assumed.

On the basis of available data, both written and oral, it was found that the average wooden house in Gujarat was about 150 years old, i. e. dating from about 1800 A. D. A few were dateable to about 1750 A. D. A number of these older houses had collapsed within a few years of each other while this study was being undertaken, i. e. in about 1970 A. D., thus giving a period of about 170 years as the life-span of a typical urban house in wood. In some museums, however, remains of woodwork from medieval *haveli* - temples have been preserved, dating from about 1600 A. D. No woodwork in Gujarat is older than this. Thus the total time-span of existing woodwork in Gujarat is from about 1600 A. D. to 1900 A. D., i. e. the time-span during which wooden houses continued to be constructed. That also gives the time-span for the wood carvings.

One very interesting point regarding the wood carvings was discovered when comparisons were made between several buildings of different ages, namely that the older buildings had less of carvings. The large quantum of wood used and its structural quality, as also the large size of these older houses, proved that it was not the shortage of finances which was the cause of the paucity of carvings. There must have been other reasons.



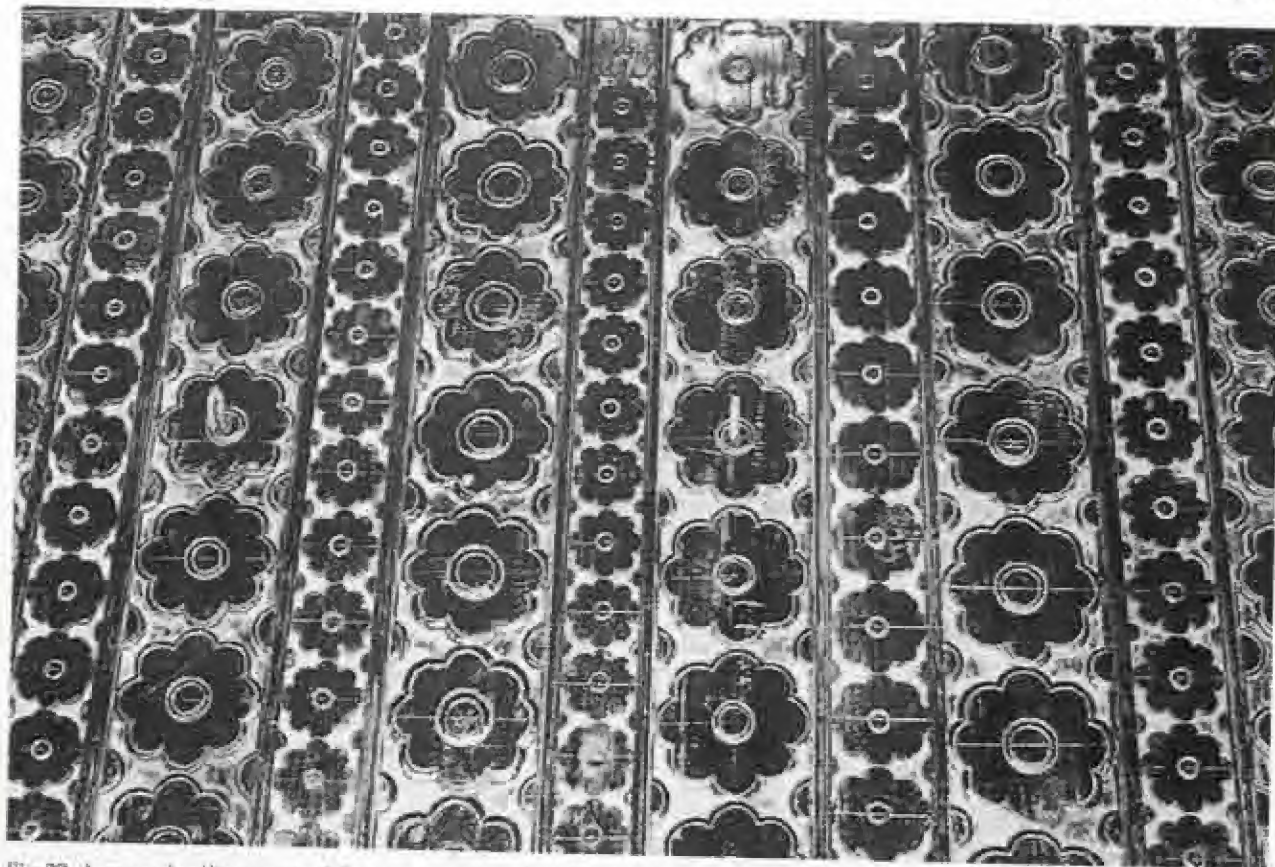


Fig.32 A carved ceiling around the courtyard made up of strips of planking of different sizes. The decoration is in the form of raised rosettes of two different sizes.

While it was not possible to exactly define these, one particular aspect which emerged upon studying the historical references of the period was, that throughout the period of Muslim rule in Gujarat, there existed a great sense of urban insecurity, with outbreaks of civic strife between contending political rivals occurring frequently. Such urban strife would inevitably result in riot and plunder of private property. In addition, the constant state of warfare between political rulers resulted in towns being attacked and sacked, the houses dug up for supposedly hidden treasure, the walls demolished to discover secret chambers, etc. Those houses which revealed their wealth by displaying rich carvings were the first to be attacked. Thus it became risky to display wealth. A plain exterior was the best guarantee of being left in peace. With the coming of British, there arose a far

greater sense of urban security and houses began to gradually display a greater quantum of decoration, particularly in towns directly administered by them. Thus, for example, the large Swaminarayan temples with their rich carvings were all built during British rule; they could never have come up during the preceding era.

Once the general situation of urban security encouraged architectural display, it could be noticed that wood carving became a prime method of showing status and wealth. House owners vied with each other in possessing houses with more and more of carvings, greater ornateness of detailing, and a variety of themes. Whole house fronts were finished in wood, every inch of which carried some kind of carving. Often in the search for



variety, grotesque features were adopted, as will be shown in the illustrations. But if a family could not afford much display, it was certain to at least have a carved wooden door. The doors of the Gujarati house had, at least for Hindus and Jains, a ritual status which demanded special treatment and they were all made very imposing and massive with boldly carved lintels and shutters. Muslim doors were plain, but they made up by having rich interiors.

If one compares the three sub-divisions of Gujarat as regards their woodwork and carvings, certain differences clearly emerge. The maximum quantum of woodwork and of wood carving appears in the houses of North Gujarat. This was to be expected, given the fact that North Gujarat was the most prosperous part of the province. South Gujarat was the poorest, but being nearer to supplies of timber, it shows something anomalous: the houses have a great deal of rather inferior timber in the construction



Fig.33. A wall niche fringed with carved wood. It has cusped arch with suspended tendril below. The over-hanging shelf above the fringed one bears typical Gujarati pendants.





Fig.34. View of the women's *sofala* carved in wood. The opening has cusped arch, the tapering columns and pierced balustrades.

but very little carving. Saurashtra has a peculiar position. Wood was scarce but stone was plentiful, even if inferior, so that Saurashtra turned to the use of stone for construction. As mentioned, this friable stone did not permit good carving, and many richer houses used stucco for decoration. Others introduced wooden members for purposes of display, but it could clearly be noticed that much of the carving showed foreign influence.

These differences between the three subdivisions has other aspects. The oldest woodwork appears in North Gujarat; the most recent in South Gujarat; while Saurashtra lies in between. These differences correspond to the economic development of each region: North Gujarat was the region where economic growth first took place, followed by Saurashtra,

whereas south Gujarat developed only when migrants from elsewhere entered and settled in this mainly tribal area.

The prosperity of North Gujarat was initiated and borne by the mercantile classes, consisting of Vaishyas and Brahmins, later Patels, among the Hindus; by Jains; and among the Muslims the Vohras. It was their houses which were the largest and richest in design. There must have once existed important houses belonging to Muslim rulers and administrators, but of these very few have survived. In Saurashtra it was the feudal Rajput aristocracy which chiefly possessed wealth but all their older palaces (called *darbargadhs*) are in a mixed semi-colonial style of later date, while the newer palaces are wholly European or pseudo Indo-Saracenic. All such palaces have been



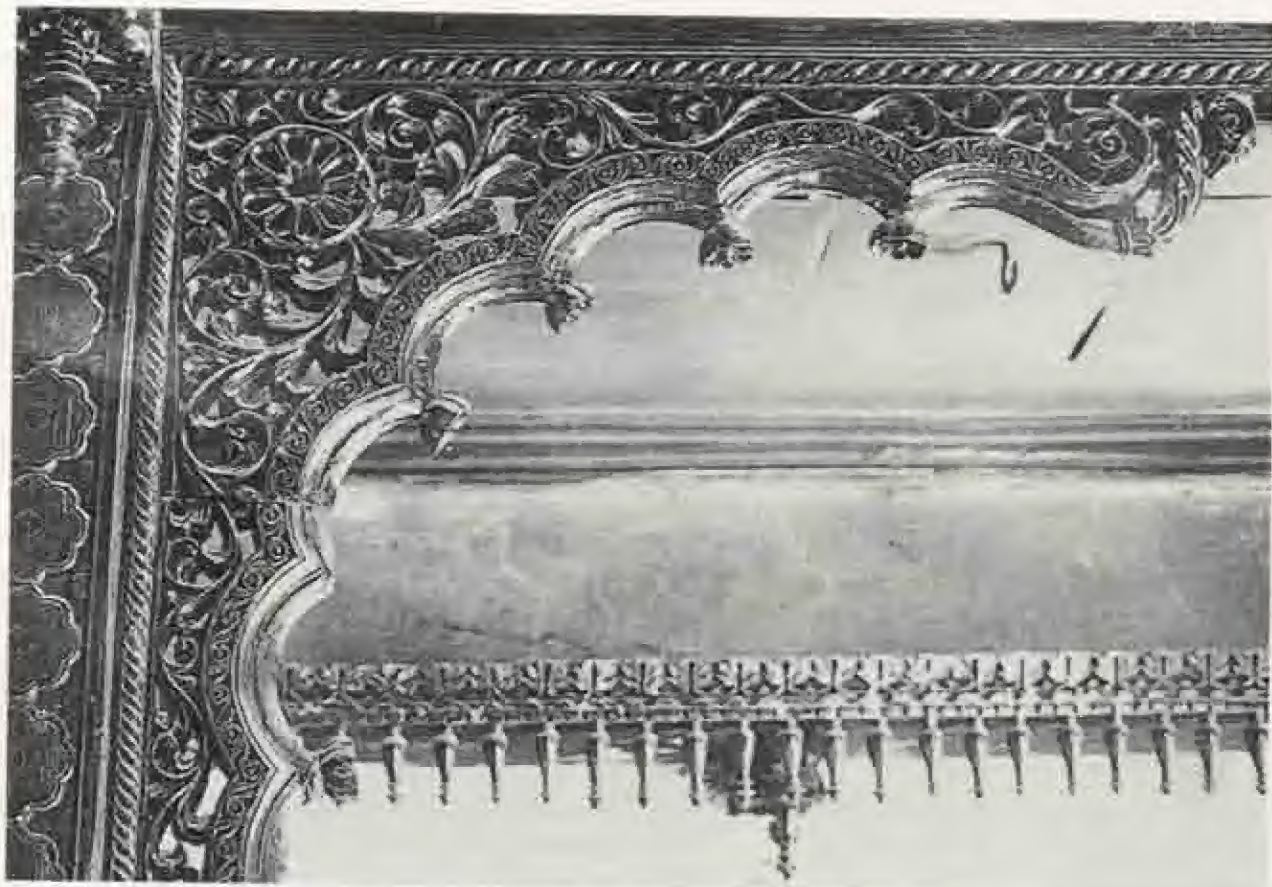


Fig.35. Close-up of the women's *sojila*.

excluded from this study except to illustrate a few items. In South Gujarat it was the Brahmin Anavils and Parsis who were the dominant groups, with a sprinkling of Jains, and it is their houses which are the most substantial. The position of Surat is unique: it was the only town to have a large cosmopolitan population drawn from all parts of Gujarat

but all the older architecture disappeared in the great fire of 1837.

It is a curious commentary on the distribution of wealth that the two finest carved houses in Gujarat belong, not to Vaishyas, Brahmins, Vohras or Rajputs, but to the rising community of Patels represented by a single family in the small village of Vaso near Nadiad.



## II

# TECHNICAL AND THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF WOOD CARVING

The most important characteristic of Gujarat wood carving is that it is closely related to the architecture, i. e. it is not an independent art-form. Woodwork had already been introduced into the architecture as an essential part of construction, and the visual presence of so much woodwork naturally led to its being carved. Wood carving was, in the best sense of that term, applied art. Virtually all the carving was done on structural parts, and only rarely was a carved piece inserted merely for its decorative effect. The location of carvings on structural members produced certain limitations derived from the nature of the material.

Wood by its very nature is linear in form, so that all structural members made of wood inevitably partake of this linear character. This means that large voluminous carvings, for examples in stone, was not possible. All the structural parts of wooden buildings, such as beams, columns, struts, door and window frames, etc., were linear in form and this compelled the style of carving to conform to linearity. The kind of carving most suited to linearity was the running or meandering pattern, and this is precisely what does occur most frequently. Figural work also appears, but mainly as single figures attached to linear supports. Where more complex groups were

wanted, they had to be of a very small size in order to fit into the narrowness of the timber parts.

The exception to the above rule was in ceilings where a broad surface was produced by the use of planks. As we shall see, this is not an original Gujarati technique, but even here the only freedom which arose was to spread the pattern thinly over a large, flat surface. But the unit of design could not exceed the width of a single plank, i. e. there was again a limitation of space.

The second limitation on design arose from the fact that wood, when it is a structural member, cannot be weakened by excessive depth of carving or by piercing it because that would risk its stability. The bulk of a structural member has to be left intact, so that carving can never be in the round; there has always to be a portion left intact forming the backing of the figure. Pierced wood did occur, as in pierced window screens, but these were not structural parts and could bear the weakening of the material. Incidentally, even here, wood was not really pierced but the screen was built up of separate pieces joined together with gaps in between. Some pierced carvings did appear in those relatively minor pieces which functioned as coverings to the structural members, for example in the pieces shaped as elephant heads



to mask joist ends. However, in many of the later houses a desire to have baroque-like structure for ostentation produced pierced work even in structural members but that was originally not part of the tradition.

The third limitation on design derives from the fact that wood, in order to be used, has to be first planed to a smooth surface. It could be either flat or rounded. The plain surface is not conveniently carved by incising into it a shallow depth and rounding off the edges. And this is precisely how most of the carving was actually executed. To go further into the material would serve no purpose so far as the design was concerned because the design remained what had originally been etched onto the surface. The shallow incised pattern was a sufficiently effective one and it was left as such. Deeper cutting into the material or more rounded parts appear very infrequently, mostly in figural work and in struts. The latter were over-dimensioned to start with in order to accommodate the depth of carving. Also, the strut has little load to carry.

Structural woodwork has to be first made ready on the ground before being hoisted into place. In the process of hoisting and installation it is always liable to damage, especially if it is a heavy beam. A beam of say, 550 cm. length and 40 x 40 cm. cross-section is so heavy that to lift it in place is a hazardous undertaking and parts of it are liable to be knocked about. If such a beam were carved, the carving risked being damaged during installation. In addition, the beam would have to be loaded with numerous other structural members such as joists, planks, bricks, and all these could further damage carvings. Because of these risks, the main beams were in fact never carved. When one sees an apparently carved main beam, the carving is merely a cover strip nailed onto it subsequently to conceal a junction with other members. Lighter, subsidiary beams, on the other hand, were often carved.

Other structural parts which were generally not carved were ceiling joists, attached columns, bonding timbers, and the jambs of doors and windows; however, the capitals of the attached columns and lintels were carved. The general principle seems to be that parts which underwent much manual handling during construction were left uncarved. The exceptions to this rule are the capitals and the lintels. The former were blocks of wood which, if left uncarved, would have presented a very ugly appearance and so they were merely given a curving profile: the main body was not carved except in very late baroque-like houses where older traditions were overthrown. The carving of lintels was for ritualistic reasons, as will be explained later. The rule regarding leaving certain parts uncarved was broken in those late houses where the desire for ostentation had overridden all other considerations.

It could be clearly observed that all the carving which was applied to a wooden member was executed before installation, i.e. there was no *in situ* carving. This is normal carpentry practice. The main wooden parts which were carved were: free-standing columns, especially in front verandahs; struts supporting projecting balconies and ceilings; balconies; lintels of doors and windows and their shutters; lighter beams visible on elevations; interior ceilings in some cases; wooden frontages to upper floors. Subsidiary wooden parts which were carved were cappings to cover the free ends of beams and joists visible on the elevation; fascia boards; and window grills. The rules regarding which wooden parts were to be carved and which do not reveal a very sound sense of building construction was based upon experience. It produced an artistic tradition of great merit, which was only debased when the house became, not a symbol of good taste, but a symbol of wealth.

Woodwork was generally finished in



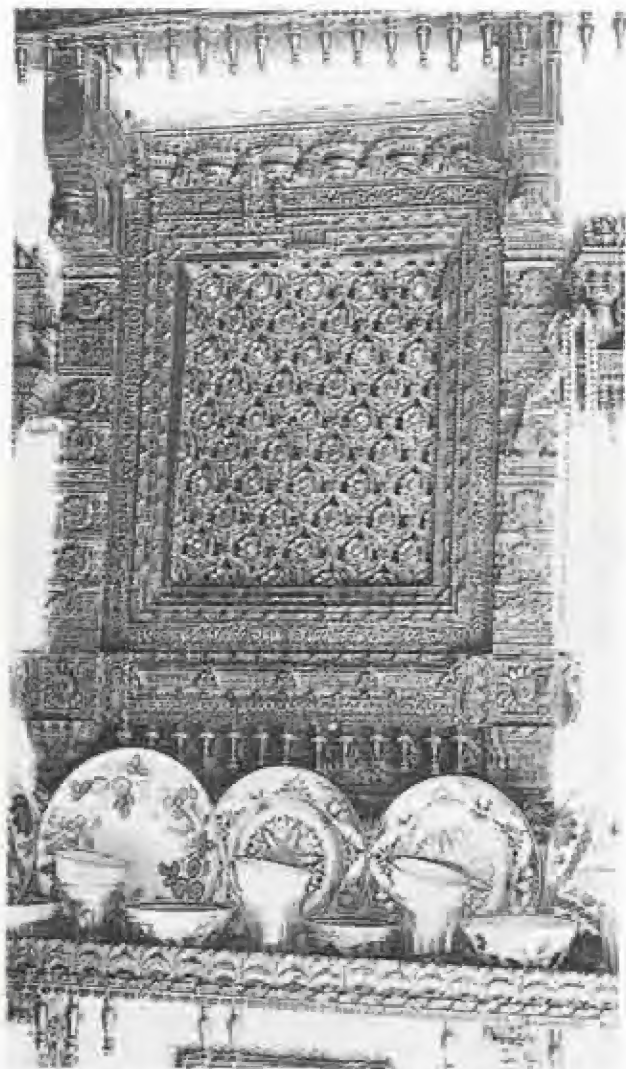


Fig.36. A carved window grill with superimposed flowers. The jambs of each grill are also fully carved with row of more elaborately incised rosettes separated by serrated bands

three ways. One was to tint it with a kind of varnish which gave it a dark shade. This treatment was given to almost all internal woodwork which we saw, and it seems that originally it was the only technique employed throughout.

The second method was to apply an almost black protective coating of oil locally called *bel-tel*, if not to all parts, then at least to exterior woodwork. This black oil appears mainly in the Ahmedabad region and is

characteristic of it. There were two reasons for its use. One, that the oil was particularly effective against climatic influences in exposed woodwork. The second being the main reason wherein the Ahmedabad carving of exterior fronts was of a peculiar kind in that the surface was incised in a very minute pattern; this minute pattern would have got quite obliterated had thicker fluid such as paint been employed as a coating. While simple tinting gave inadequate protection in exterior locations, the use of *bel-tel* gave protection while retaining the clarity of the carving. An elevation consisting of such black, finely carved woodwork looked very imposing indeed—as some of the illustrations will show.

The third method was to apply a coating of paint, especially to those parts of the woodwork which were either greatly exposed to the climate or were very visible and thus contributed to the 'display' which the architecture sought to convey. Whether the use of paint goes back to early times is not known. The colours used in surviving examples are mainly red, yellow, green and blue. A reference to the painting of Gujarati woodwork in a survey carried out in 1886 is illuminating. "This newer work is, moreover, almost invariably ruined by paint. Brilliant reds, greens, and yellows, picked out in very haphazard manner, quite drown the carver's work.", and further on, "... and the uniform sepia-tinted carving shows to advantage alongside the meretricious work of the present day."<sup>10</sup>

This reference seems to indicate that the use of paint was a later innovation and that sepia-tinting was the older, traditional technique. Paints, besides distracting by its garish colours, has another serious disadvantage: it has a thick consistency which hides and obscures delicate outlines of carving. The paint was customarily applied afresh at all important festivities such as marriages, so that



successive coats completely marred the appearance.

The minute carving of Ahmedabad mentioned above is quite different in character from the rest of Gujarat. A chance visit to the Baroda museum to inspect some wood carvings revealed that the museum possessed old wooden carved blocks once used for block-printing of textiles. It was at once apparent that the patterns used in these blocks were almost identical with those appearing in the Ahmedabad frontages, and that they were the source of the design. Ahmedabad had once been famous for the manufacture of printed fabrics and a whole class of wood carving and wood carvers devoted to this trade must have existed. It is well possible that it was this class which did the actual carving of such house fronts, as distinguished from other carvers who executed more structural parts. When using printing blocks, they have to be coated with a dye before imprinting upon the fabric; this could also have furnished the idea of 'dyeing' carvings with *bel-tel* or even colouring them as was done with fabrics.

Regarding the wood carving patterns and motifs used it was not possible to get any information from present-day carpenters regarding the sources of design. However, the manner in which carpenters (and carvers) worked is known, because it has remained unchanged over centuries. The Indian carpenter never owned or worked in a 'workshop': he was traditionally an itinerant artisan who carried his primitive and light tools along with him and worked on site for his patrons. This custom persists even today. He always worked from memory and not from some pattern-book which he had compiled or which his predecessors had preserved. His motifs were those which he had learnt from his teachers or those which he had picked up from his surroundings; some might have been specifically ordered by his clients. It should be kept in mind

that it is quite easy to preserve a small fragment of carving as a sample to be copied later on. Such fragments were easily obtainable from old houses being demolished and could serve as models of design, but whether such a practice existed is not certain.

One other interesting custom has to be mentioned. There were, and still are, people who dealt in the purchase and sale of used structural timber. They would buy up old houses on the verge of collapse, cart away the rubble, and collect all the wooden members in their

Fig.37. A close-up of carved window grill. This is the characteristic of Patan Muslims.







Fig. 38. A plain pillar with simple embossed projections turning into square shaft with two projections at the upper end in a Muslim house at Patan.





Fig 39. Close-up of the picture depicted at figure 38.





Fig.40. A door with simple design. The lintel and *tollas* are carved.



open storages for sale to prospective clients. The old wood from such houses was quite serviceable and, being a precious commodity, found a ready buyer either in its original form or as a raw material to be reworked. We found many house-owners preserving such old timber and re-using them even in modern flats. A storage yard of such old, carved wood would provide an ideal collection of varied motifs for a carpenter to learn from. This would then represent a very convenient source for the

not only because the same family of carpenters were producing them, but also because families were copying from each other. A striking motif introduced in one house was soon being copied, with minor variations, in many other houses. It also happened that motifs were being borrowed from more towns distant, and this must have arisen in two ways. Some of the artisans would have picked up novel ideas during their travels, say to places of pilgrimage. In other cases, it was the client who had seen something new

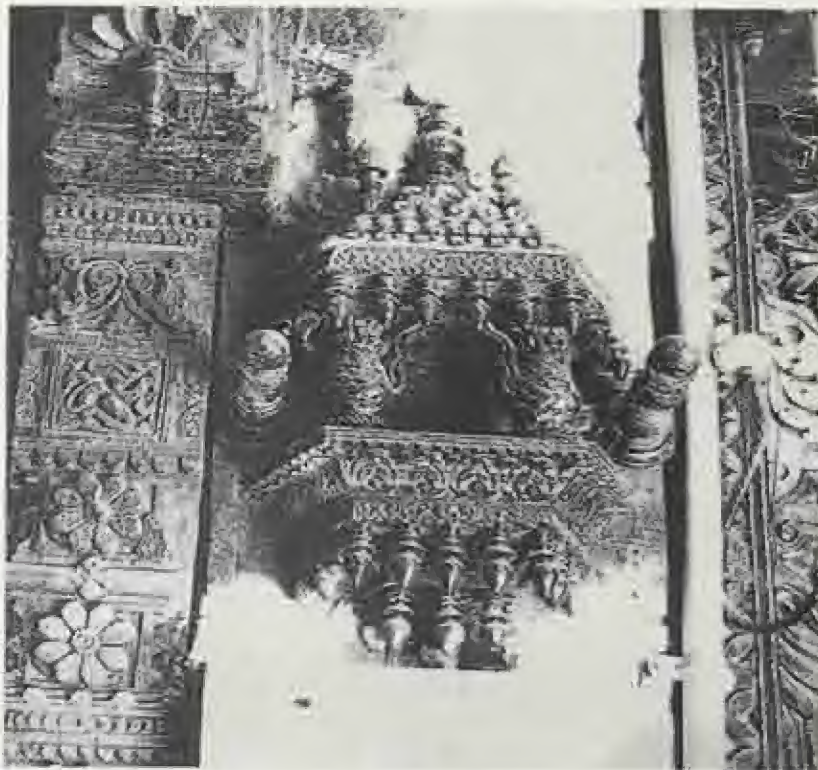


Fig.41. A small carved shrine between wall cupboards. The canopy is supported by twin columns and curvilinear struts and a balustrade below. The window grills, niches and, upper shelves are carved. The niches serve no useful purpose but are merely decorated.

diffusion of design motifs.

Whatever be the source of designs, we could observe during the field work that for a particular town there was a general similarity in motifs which was characteristic of that locale and distinguished it from other towns. The presence of such a similarity of designs arose

elsewhere and wanted it copied. Such distant borrowings were not very frequent but the custom existed. Among Muslim families, where figural work was discouraged due to religious reasons, the search for acceptable motifs must have led to borrowings from further afield. Also, in the late 19th century A. D., as tradition weakened under colonial influence, many



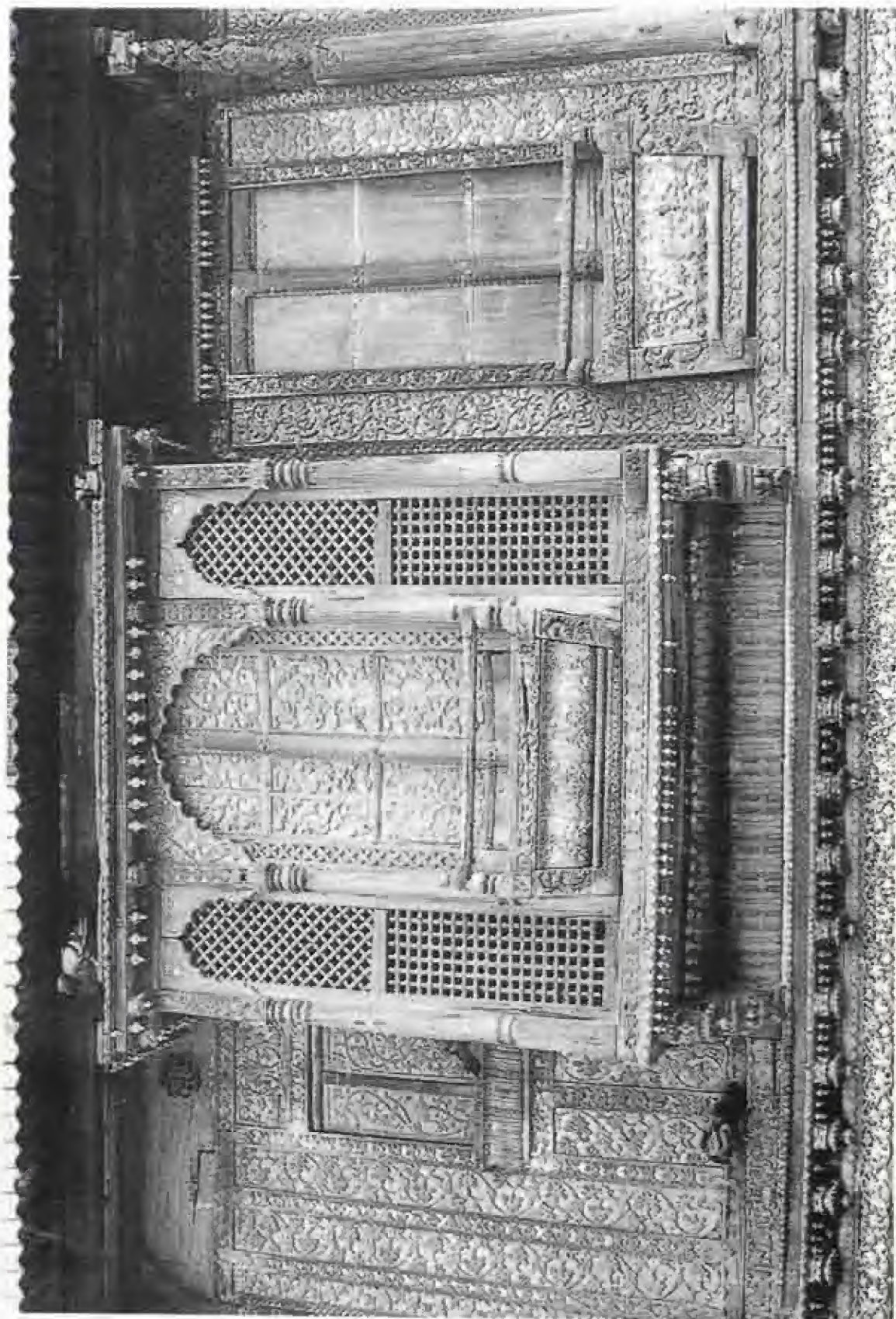


Fig.42. A window shutter carved in a very bold floral pattern.



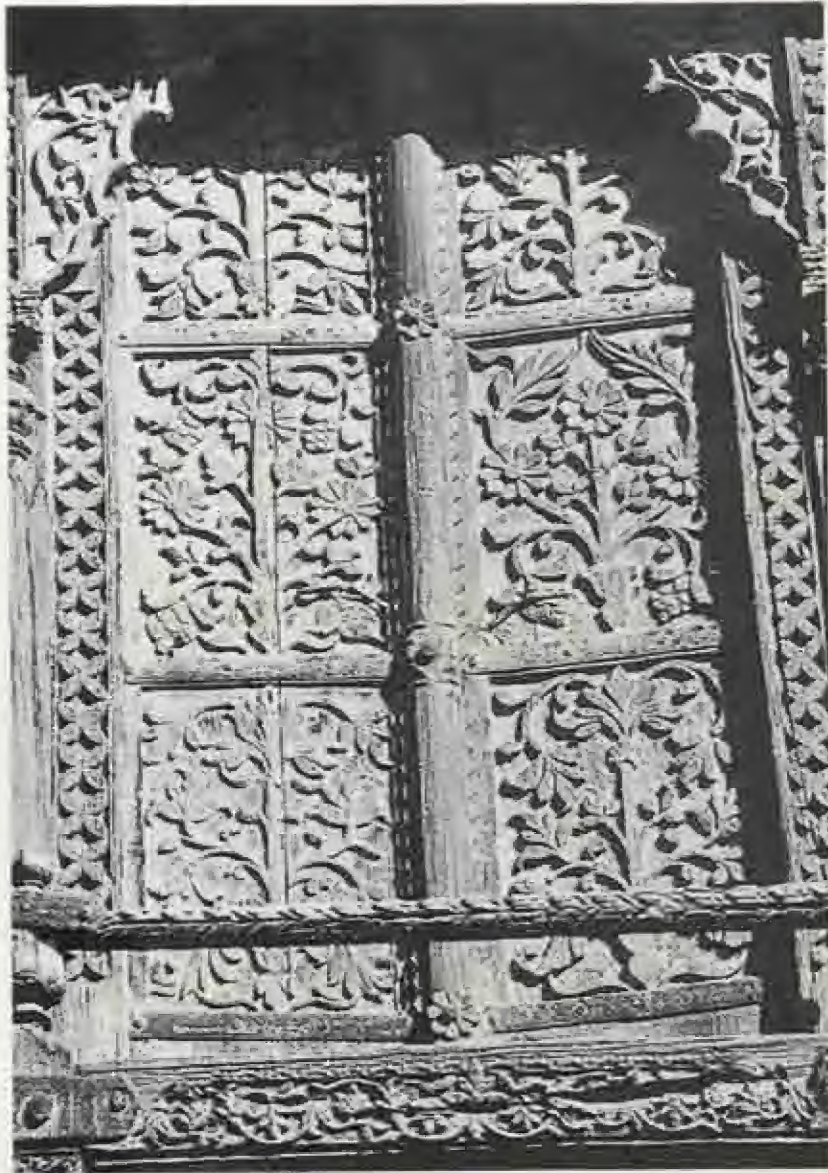


Fig.43. Surface of a window shutter carved in a very bold floral pattern; Large blank areas are left plain so that a high relief and high contrast are produced.

motifs were incorporated haphazardly from foreign sources.

At this point it is useful to examine some of the official reports on wood carving which were prepared by experts under governmental orders. One of the earliest is the *Indian Art - Technical Art Series*, published from 1886 onwards by the Survey of India. Regarding Gujarat it says, "Old wood carving is found all

over Western India, from Sidhpur, in North Gujarat, to Bhatkal, at the extreme south of the Presidency, but it is perhaps most plentifully found in Gujarat". It then adds, "Both the new and the old work are generally put together in a very rough and unbusiness-like way. The carver's work appears to have ended with the carving, and the village carpenter, took in hand as much timber, knocked it together with great iron spikes, nails, and rough clumsy clamps.



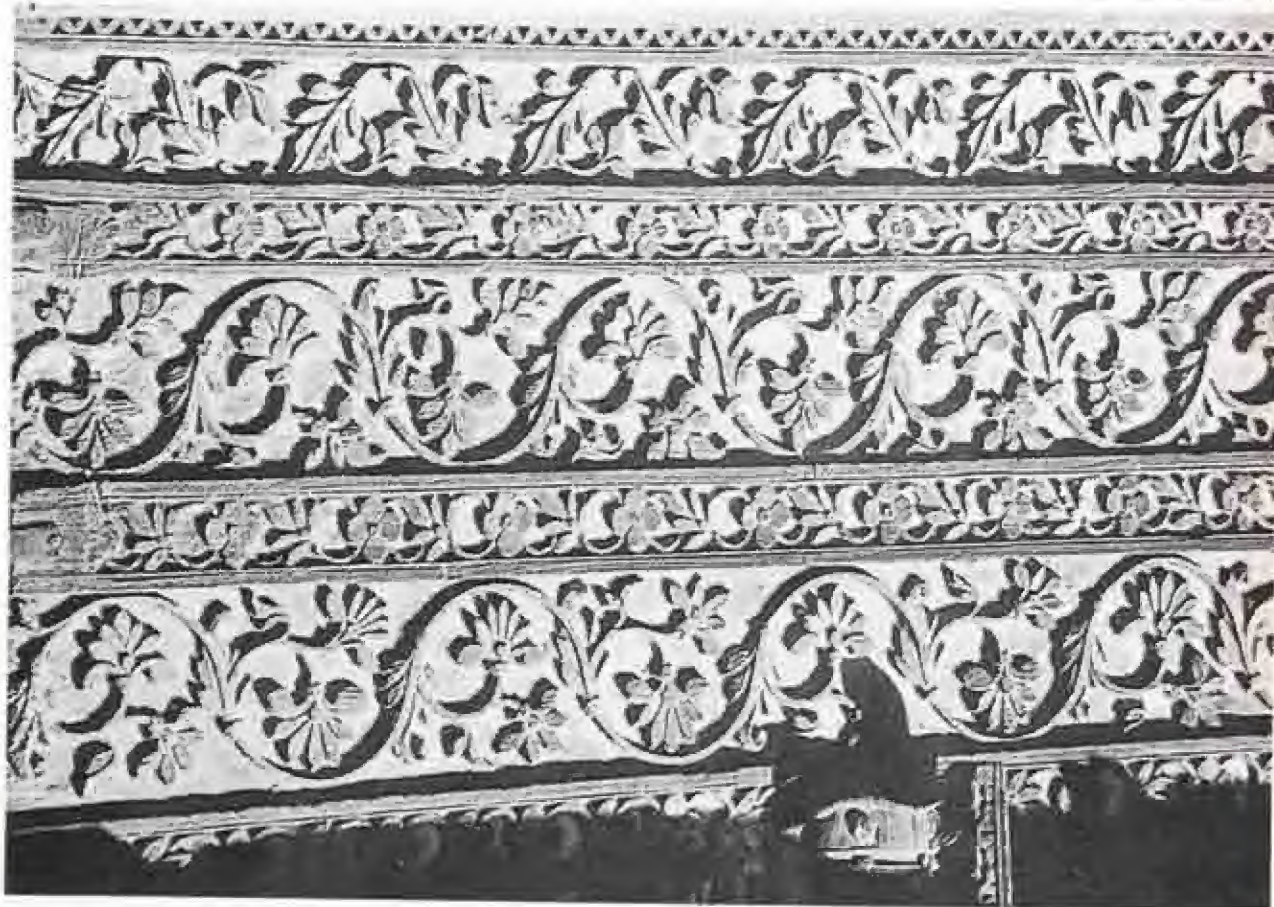


Fig.44. The lower part of wooden frontage, carved with floral designs.

Joinery was always, and still is, a very weak point in native work. Wood carving of this class is very frequently disfigured by the presence of ugly iron chains, nail-heads, bolts and clamps, attached with utter disregard to the design, and often in the middle of the best work. " 11

These observations are very interesting as they raise a number of technical points. It is indeed a fact that many designs were marred by nails and clamps driven through in apparent carelessness. But the reasons were different. Timber joints have a tendency to expand and contract under seasonal influences: after some time the joints would become loose and it was to secure them that, much after the original construction, these iron fittings were added. They were in these cases not part of the original

conception. On the other hand, metal fittings were in fact added to the woodwork in many places from the very beginning: for example at the junction of balustrades to uprights, or indoor shutters. In all such cases, as can be seen from the illustration, these metal fittings were well coordinated with carvings. The clumsy fittings are all the work of subsequent repairs done by different workmen.

The other point hinted at in the above report is that the carvings were done by one set of artisans and 'knocked' together by another, i. e. carvers and carpenters belonged to different professions. There is no evidence for such an assumption (except in the case of block makers). Certainly there was a great difference between the sophistication of carving and the



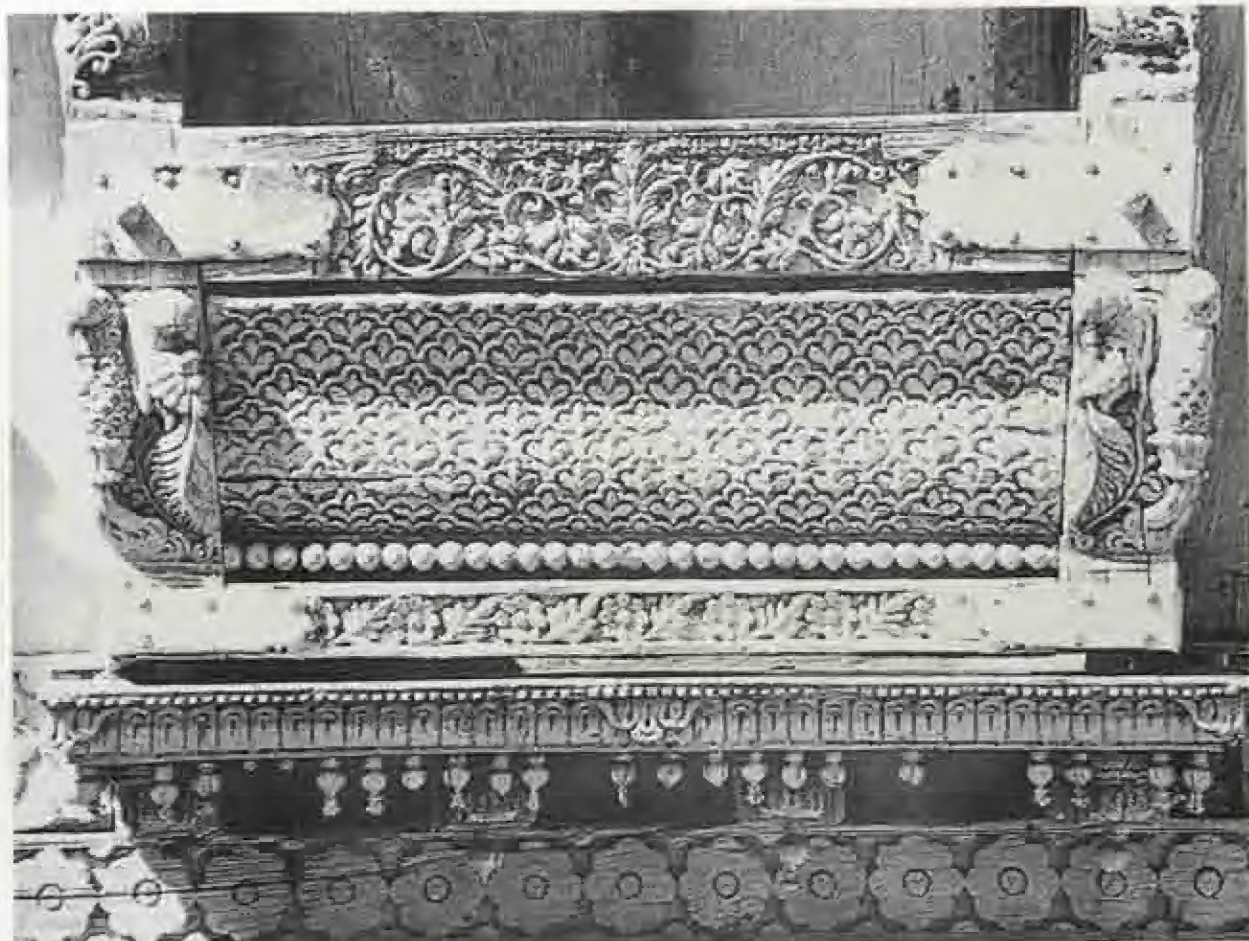


Fig.45. A balcony with floral centrepiece on the rail. The curvilinear surface has geometrical patterns.

primitiveness of the joinery, but this hiatus between refinement of detail and clumsiness in construction appears not only in woodwork but in all of the architectural arts. It is the same with temple construction. Primitive techniques of stone construction appear alongside with excellence of stone carving, although both were executed by the same artisans.<sup>12</sup> The reasons for the hiatus form part of the general Indian tradition and merit some discussion.

Indian civilisation has always been characterised by a very low level of technological development. The bullock cart, the plough and the clay water pot have remained unchanged in design for a thousand years and this is not because their designs were so perfect that they could not be improved. The reason for

technological backwardness was due to the illiteracy and low status of the artisan. Already in the *Manu Smriti*, an ancient classical text dated to about the 2nd century A. D., there is a list of occupations prescribed to the base-born, and among these is carpentry<sup>13</sup>, and in another verse it states that a Shudra (the lowest of the four castes) "... being unable to find service with the twice-born and threatened with the loss of this sons and wife (through hunger), may maintain himself by handicrafts."<sup>14</sup> In other words, handicrafts were considered of such a low status that the lowly Shudra was permitted to engage in them only when in distress. At the other end of the time scale we find in the famous work of Abbe Dubois, written about the year 1800 A.D., the following description of artisans,



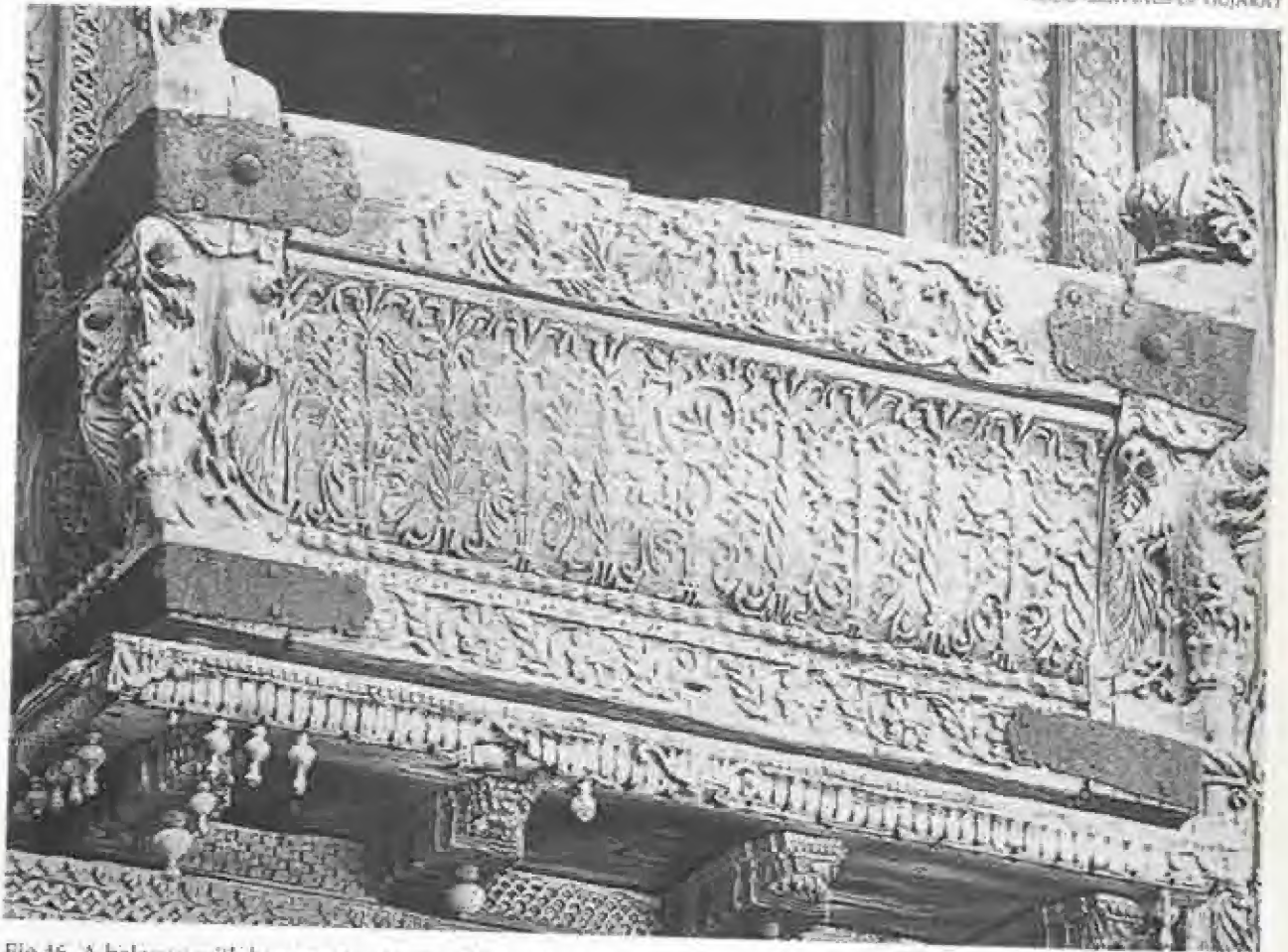


Fig. 46. A balcony with baroque treatment. The pendants are missing.

"As a rule, the mechanical and liberal arts, such as music, painting, and sculpture, are placed on very much the same level, and . . . which are left entirely to the lower castes of Shudras, are looked upon with equal disfavour." <sup>15</sup>

The illiterate, low-born and despised artisan could not be expected to innovate any developments in the technological field: it was enough if he could merely earn his livelihood. Under competitive pressure, what he could do was to improve his purely manual skills, i. e. to refine whatever he knew without changing its essential character. This meant that if he was a carver, he could perfect his dexterity to the point of making excellent carvings in imitation of what he had already learnt, but he could not go beyond that. To introduce innovations in

carpentry and joinery required an intellectual effort for which he lacked the training.

As proof of poor building technology some examples may be cited. At the famous Buddhist site of Sanchi, when the British government sent experts to repair the monuments, it was found that the foundations of the great stone balustrade were laid upon debris and had hence collapsed <sup>16</sup>. In temple No. 17, while the walls were faced with ashlar masonry, the core was of loose rubble, with very few headers to make bonding effective, so that some parts of the walls had collapsed. <sup>17</sup> Burgess and Cousens say the same thing about ancient temples in Gujarat, "The walls are generally built in two shells - the outer carrying all the mouldings and the inner dressed smooth on the



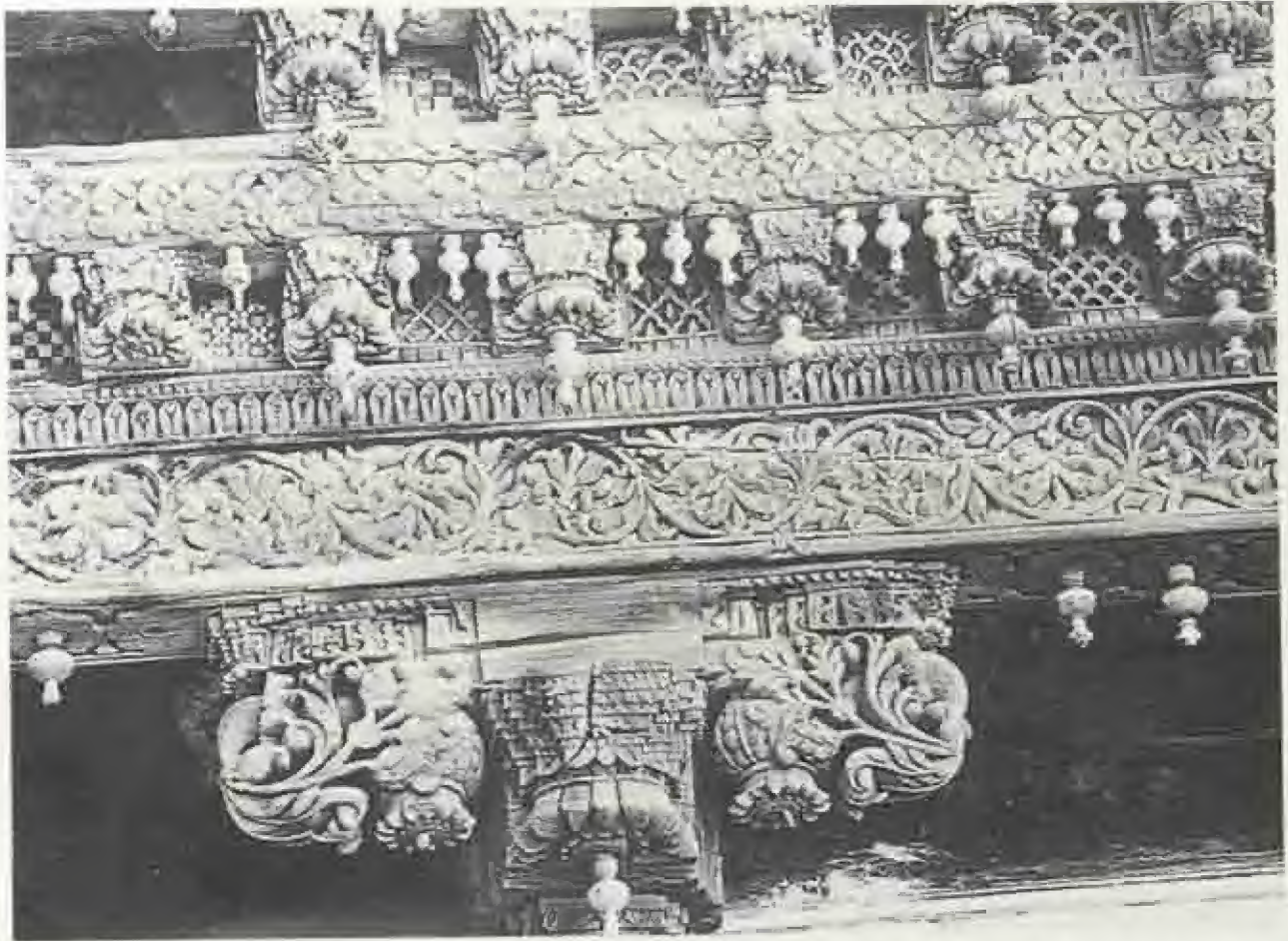


Fig.47. This column base is seen in Peoples co-op Bank, Kapadvanj. Carved details on the column base is not typical of Gujarat. It reveals European influence.

face. These are seldom well bonded; and the outer, not infrequently, has fallen completely away . . . " <sup>18</sup> Yet, these poorly built walls contained excellent carvings in stone, i. e. poor structural technique existed alongside superior fine arts. It was the same with woodwork: primitive joinery accompanied by excellence in carvings. The joinery in this case was not defective but merely archaic.

### Theoretical Aspects

There is a body of Sanskrit texts called *Shilpa Shastras* which were written in the early medieval period, and whose purpose was to prescribe rules and regulations for Indian art and architecture. The bulk of the prescriptions concern religious buildings and religious

images; there are many chapters on doors and columns; and many rules for dimensions and proportions. Most texts speak, by implication, of stone and brick structures and only one, the very late *Pramanamamjari*, speak of woodwork. The value of these texts in understanding works of art and architecture is a matter of some controversy.

D. Subba Rao, writing in the *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Baroda, says, "these treatises contain very valuable information. They convey no meaning whatever to Sanskrit scholars on account of two reasons. One is that many of the expressions, used therein, are technical terms, which convey no idea whatever in their context, by translation in the usual



manner . . . The second is that these texts have been handed down from generation to generation through those artisans who, though knowing Sanskrit, were not scholars. These texts have become so full of philological and grammatical errors that the Sanskrit scholars today would find it very difficult to make any consistent meaning out of them." <sup>19</sup> As against this view, Priyabala Shah, editor of the famous Sanskrit text on art and architecture known as *Visnudharmottara-purana*, and a sympathiser, felt constrained to remark, "Even though Dr. Kramrisch (a reputed Indologist who published two volumes on *The Hindu Temple* using Sanskrit texts) has made a very laudable attempt to compare and identify the various types of temples and their characteristics described in our text, one has to say that it is all very conjectural." Again, "Further research in the understanding of the text and a carefully minute study of the existing remains of temples in the light of the information of our text are still not sufficient as to justify any definite or near definite identification." <sup>20</sup> What this means is that it has not been possible to prove that a single temple was ever built according to the injunction of a *Shilpa Shastra* text.

George Michell, in his *The Hindu Temple*, writes of these texts, "From the language in which these works are written and the fragmentary nature of much of the information they contain, it appears that the known Shastras are much more likely to be the theoretical writings of theologians, the learned brahmins, than manuals of architectural and artistic practice compiled by builders and craftsmen. Those directly involved with the creations of the temples . . . usually had no need to set down their traditions in writing as the knowledge of building techniques was imparted from one generation to the next." Then, "The lack of technical information in the Shastras reveals their true function as a collection of rules which attempt to facilitate the translation of

theological concepts into architectural forms." <sup>21</sup>

### Conclusions

1. It is by no means certain that these rules were formulated and written down before the actual works of art and architecture were produced; rather the reverse seems to be the case. In other words, works of art and architecture already existed and the texts merely attempted to codify what was found. Thus, they do not explain anything which cannot be ascertained from the works themselves.
2. A large number of monuments of the Buddhists and of the Muslims were constructed without any texts, i.e. texts were never essential to good building. As George Michell has rightly pointed out, the purpose of these texts was theological, not structural or even artistic. Rules were conceived in a ritual sense in order to either ward off evil effects or to produce auspicious effect. Their brahmanic authors knew very little about art and architecture and produced generalities which were of no assistance to craftsmen except in a general way.
3. The descriptive nature of some of the rules are, despite their shortcomings, not worthless. They can be used as cross-references in cases where objects exist *in situ*, and are useful in those examples which have since disappeared and whose only record is a text. But even here one has to exercise great caution because these brahmanic texts, in their effort to be all-knowing and exhaustive, indulge in gross exaggeration and hyperbole and often describe buildings which were quite impossible to construct.
4. Finally, the question arises as to whether the artisan ever really used a text in his work. George Michell thinks otherwise. No



temple or image has so far been proved to have been made according to any text. The same applies to woodwork. The *Pramanamanjari* is descriptive, not prescriptive : it was written much after wooden buildings had been constructed. Given the low social status of the Indian artisan, it is extremely doubtful if any of them could understand Sanskrit. They preserved texts to enhance their status vis-à-vis clients, but there is no evidence that they ever used them. Thus, one can largely ignore texts except to illustrate certain points or when concepts are involved, particularly those affecting rituals. Thus for example, a text might prescribe that the carving in a residence should represent scenes of plenty, but it did not, and could not describe the details of its execution. Such general concept rules, part of an existing folk-lore, were codified in texts and are here used accordingly.

Turning from textual matters to the actual carvings, it is worthwhile examining the relationship between carving in stone and wood, for both were being executed contemporaneously. It is well known that in the sphere of construction stone detailing closely imitated wooden prototypes. In stone temples the manner in which columns, capitals, beams, balconies, struts, etc. , were structurally employed was in imitation of wooden practice. This wooden tradition was not, as many scholars think, some lost ancient tradition but was in current practice in the wooden houses of Gujarat. The local carpenter was still making wooden beams and capitals which the stone mason was making contemporaneously in temples of identical technique. The difference was only in external forms : the essential technique was the same in both. Yet, when it comes to the carvings, a striking difference in style and execution emerges. Temple carvings bear no doubt a conceptual similarity to those

in residences, but in the execution, they differ widely and this difference does not derive simply from the fact that one was religious and the other secular.

Take the example of the *apsara* holding a musical instrument in her hands. *Apsaras* appear in both temples and residences, but their stylistic treatment is quite different. One would have expected that given the *apsara*, whose concept is wholly religious and whose images were visible in temples, the wood carver would have immediately copied the ready-made design and reproduced it in the domestic house. But this did not happen. The temple *apsara* is a slender, elongated, sophisticated creature, whereas the domestic one is rustic and plebian in character and proportions. Even the costumes are different. Where the stone figures have ethereal faces, those in wood are typically ethnic Gujarati, with rounded peasant-like faces. Thus, it is quite obvious that we find here two quite distinct schools of carving, one in stone, the other in wood. While the themes and topics are similar in both, the actual execution is quite different. This difference is apparent even in a purely secular theme like a foliated band, i. e. it is not the religious function which has produced the difference. The reasons are examined later on.

There is one class of wooden structures in which it is stone which is the prototype and wood carving the imitation, namely in the interiors of some Jain temples. In these examples, the *mandapa* situated in front of the main shrine is decorated with a wooden interior inserted within the masonry exterior including its domical part, i. e. we get a wooden dome. The carvings of the dome and its supporting columns are identical replicas of existing stone temples, including the themes.

There is one important aspect in which the relationship between stone and wood carving has produced strong influence on the former. It has been mentioned that wood carving was always done on a structural part,



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i. e. it never appeared in its own right. In the case of figural work, i. e. images, these were always attached to a background formed of the structural part on which they were carved. This meant that such images were carved frontally, the rear being part of the supporting structure. This aspect was noticed by the great authority on Buddhist art, A. Grunwedel, who wrote, "It is the wood-carving style, above all, which is to blame for the fact that Indian sculpture never became more than a *relievo* serving for the decoration of large buildings . . ."<sup>22</sup> In other words, sculpture always remained within the spatial limitations imposed upon it by an architectural context.

It was mentioned above that the Shilpa Shastra texts are useful only in understanding

Fig.48. The outer frame of a window is plain, the inner one sparingly carved at the corners with a fine floral pattern and a running bead pattern all around.

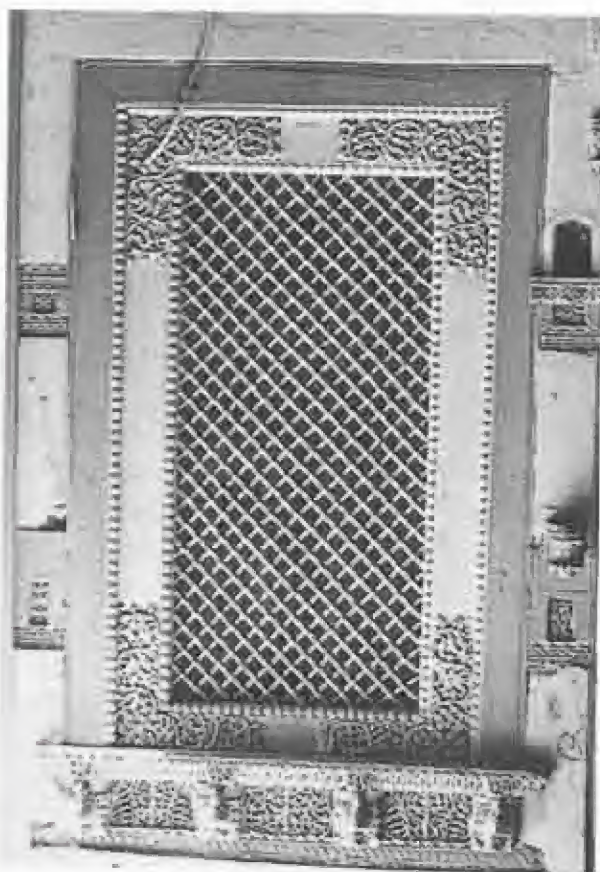


Fig.49. Two rows of flower-beds with five upturned petals on the lower part of the pillar.

some of the concepts governing carving in general, and these applied to wood carving also. The texts most relevant for Western India, including Gujarat, are : the *Samaranganasutradhara*, the *Raja - Vallabha*, the *Prasada-mandana*, and the *Pramanamajari*. Of these, the first - named is the oldest and most famous; the next two are virtual re-modelled versions of the first; while the last - named is unique in being devoted entirely to domestic arts and architecture, but unfortunately its value is greatly diminished by its late date of 1888 A. D.

Chapter 34 of the *Samarangana-sutradhara*, verses 5 onwards, lists those motifs which should not occur in residences: gods, *daityas* (demons), *grahas* (planet conjunctions symbolised by demon





Fig.50. The strut has a large floral design, with deep undercutting and human figures at the base

masks), stars, *yakshas* (mythical tree - spirits), *gandharvas* (heavenly male musicians), *rakshasas* (forest giants), *vidyadharas* (heavenly musicians), snakes, *apsaras* (heavenly female musicians), etc.-these were the anthropomorphic figures to be avoided. Among the proscribed birds and beasts were: vulture, owl, pigeon, hawk, crow, elephant, horse, buffalo, camel, cat, donkey, monkey, lion, tiger, pig and deer.

Permitted motifs were: objects arousing devotion, family deities, *pratiharas* (door guardians), treasure, *gauri* (a female divinity), *lakshmi* (goddess of wealth), cows, leaves and flowers, females in *ratikrida* (love-play), water, partridges, parrots, etc.

The above list is not really remarkable, for it seeks to avoid obviously fierce, passionate or dangerous creatures; while those recommended are intended to produce peace, plenty, personal

devotion, filial love, etc. But the striking fact is that the domestic house did not strictly follow these rules. Elephant heads, horses, mythical beasts of fierce disposition, *vidyadharas* and *apsaras* appear regularly, while in two houses we discovered a carving showing a peacock devouring a scorpion. A very notable exclusion in the list is the figure of Ganesha, the elephant god, which is found in numerous door lintels, it is apparent that those who executed wood carving were not following any classical codes; they followed an eclectic fashion which partly obeyed local floating tradition of folk-lore and partly sought for novelties to please wealthy clients.

The presence of religion and mythical motifs, such as *vidyadharas*, *apsaras* and

Fig.51. A strut with a male figure wearing Maratha costume, holding the stalk of a rising vine and flanked by two women bearing fly-whisks.







Fig.52. At the corner of the balcony, the end of a beam-end flares the bracket of capital like a convoluted plant.



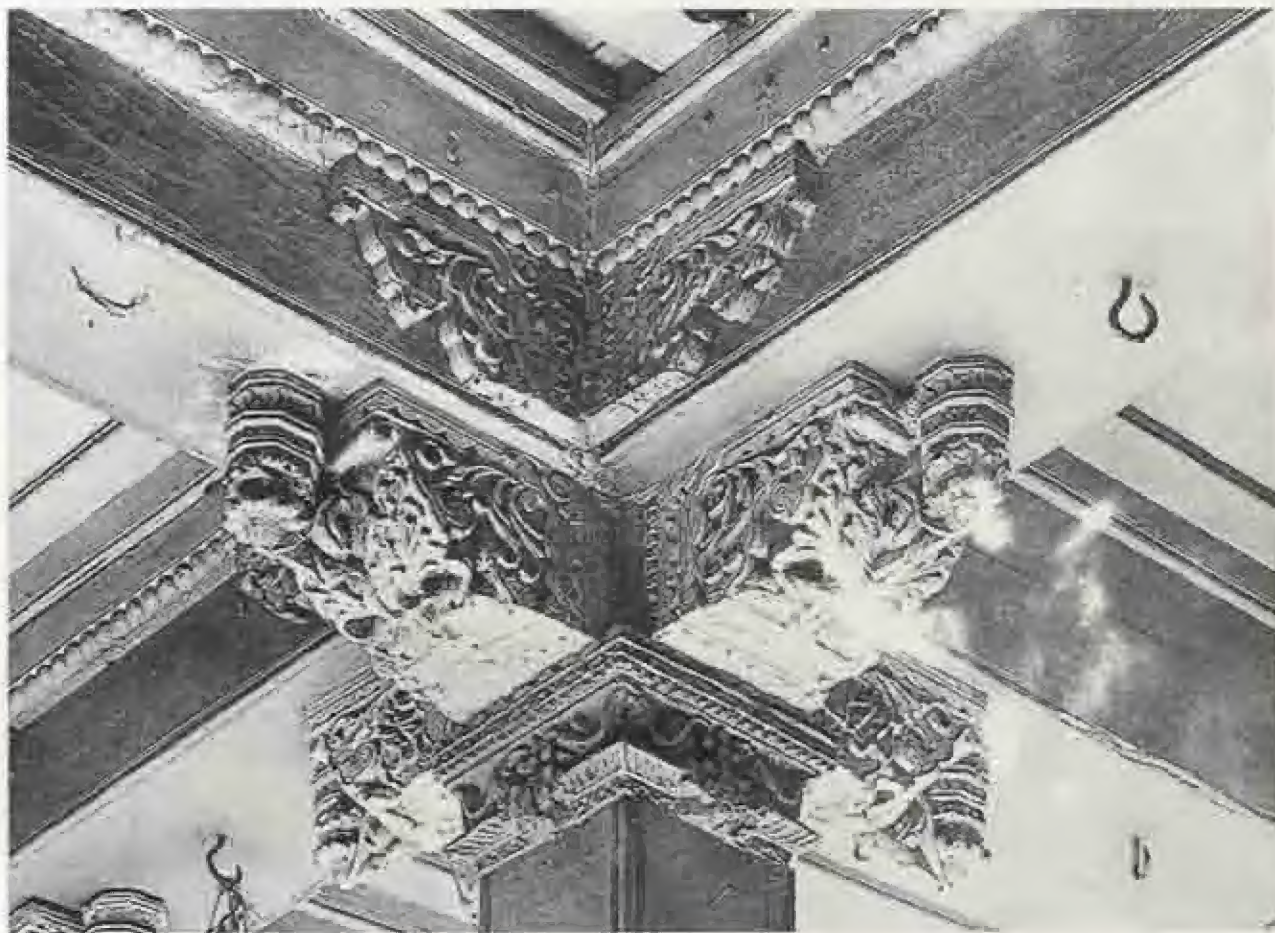


Fig.53. Two beams are crossing over a column. The small carved portions at the corner are separate pieces. The beading belongs to the fascia board above it.

mythical beasts in domestic architecture was not fortuitous. They had earlier begun to appear in the domestic *haveli*-temple and once having gained popularity there, they were soon borrowed in residences which, in design and appearance, were identical with *haveli*-temples. The establishment of the *haveli*-temple has an unusual origin, based upon a new conception of the *bhakti* cult of popular Vaishnavism.

It is probably the Pushti Marga, a sect founded by Vallabhacharya in the 15th century A. D., which seems to have been the first to conceive of the *haveli*-temple. Their religious conception broadly follows the main Vaishnava tradition in which the deity is looked upon in anthropomorphic terms as a 'divine lord' who

has to be housed in a 'palace' upon earth and served as an earthly lord would be. That is to say, he has to be provided a court, a throne room, sleeping accommodation, a kitchen, stables, etc., and during the course of the day he has to be formally awakened with song, bathed, given meals, presented to devotees for a *darshana*, put back to sleep, etc. Now, this original scheme of worship was modified by the Pushti Marg in such a manner as to bring the guru of spiritual preceptor into the forefront of worship. R. G. Bhandarkar has explained this new concept as follows, "... the God cannot be worshipped independently in a public place of worship, but in the house and temple of the guru ... which has therefore to be regularly



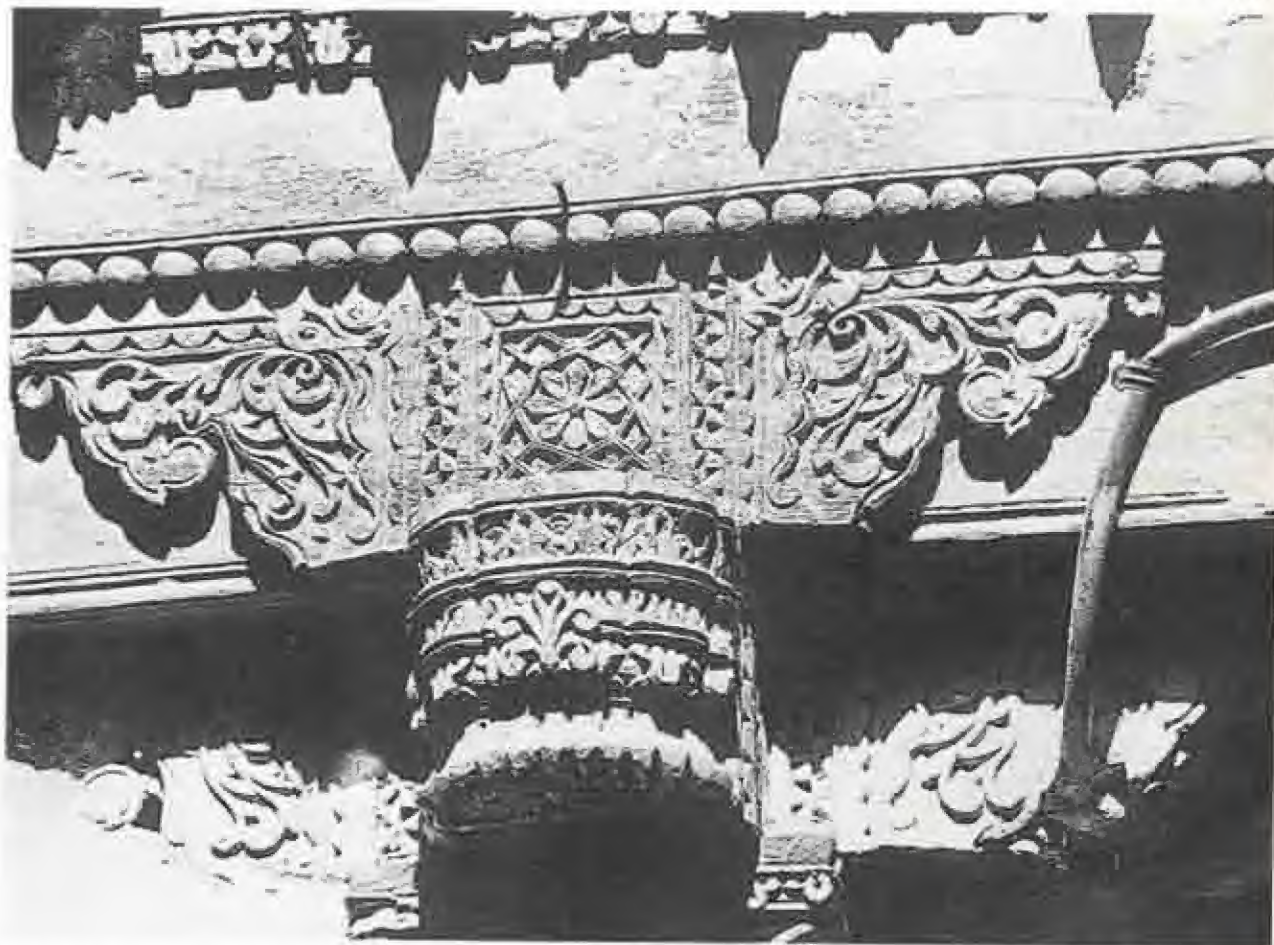


Fig.54. The carving on the bracket - capital is of ornate kind. Two carved panels nailed on to a main beam to produce decorative effect. It has floral motifs.

visited by the devotee with offering. " 23

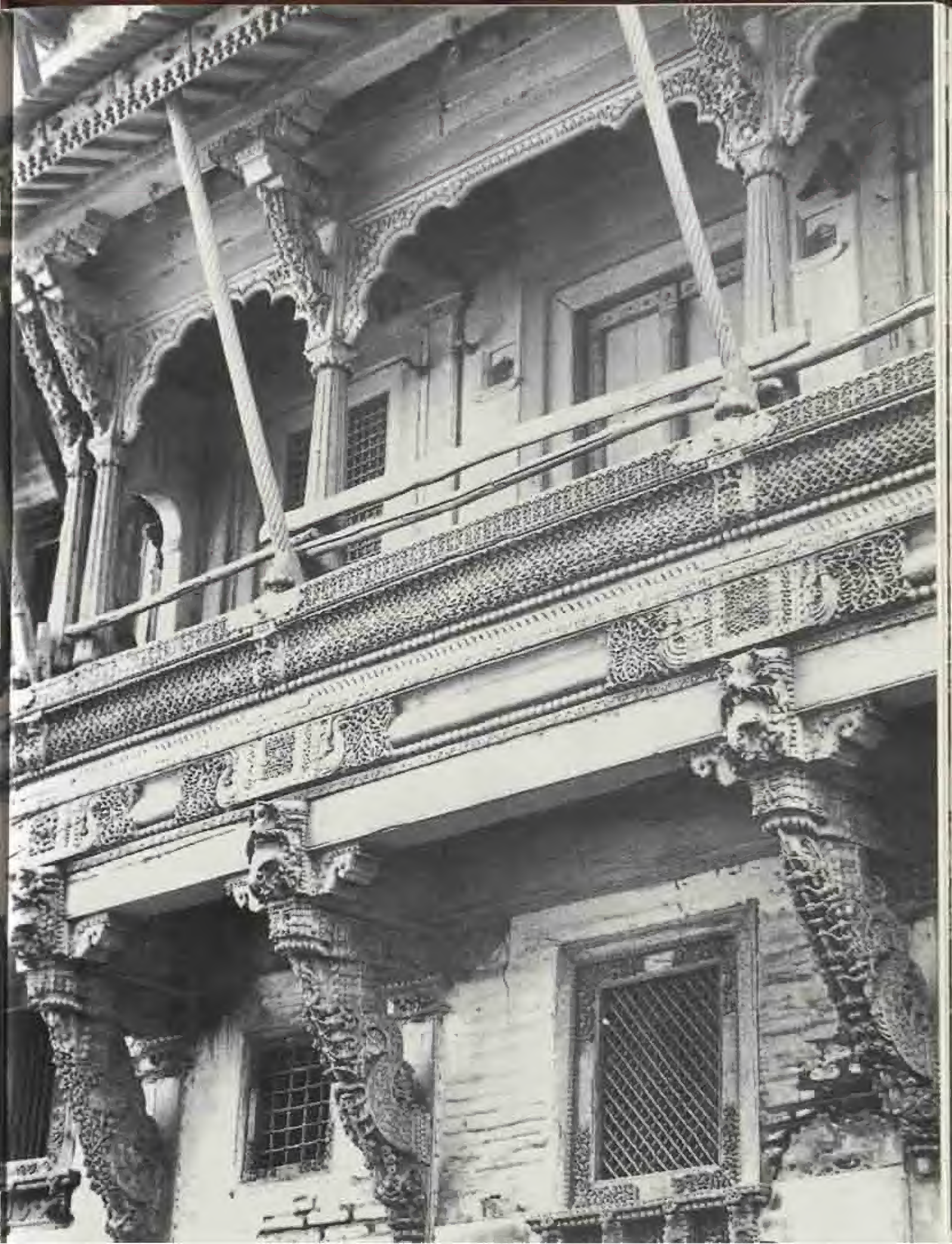
Once the guru's residence becomes the abode of the deity, it naturally has to become more spacious and imposing, but the original character of 'residence' remains; what is added are decorations and carvings in greater profusion and containing religious themes. We thus find the domestic house with themes drawn from two sources : one secular, the other religious. It is because of the addition of the religious theme that one now finds carvings showing creatures such as the *vyala* (composite beast-partly lion, partly bird, and partly elephant), the divine, musicians, even Krishna with cows and *gopis*, etc. Once such religious motifs had been introduced into what was

architecturally still a domestic residence, it became a model for the devotee who now included them even in his private residence, i.e. themes from the haveli-temple were borrowed by the haveli. This is how religious motifs entered the domestic sphere.

The above will now make it clear that the entry of religious themes did not originate in the classical Hindu or Jain temple, but from a more domesticated sphere, so that there occurs a hiatus between religious themes as depicted in classical temples and those depicted in

Fig.55. Rear elevation with long balconies, doors and windows. They are protected by a large weather-shade supported on diagonal poles (facing page)







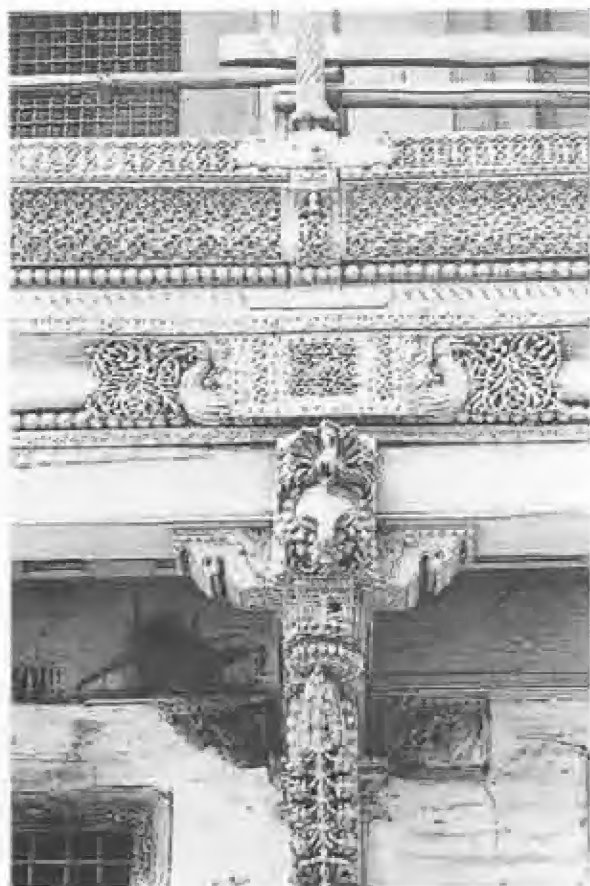


Fig. 56. The plain beam supports a curvilinear fascia board and above a curvilinear balustrade. At the bottom of the balcony is a carved strut in the form of an elephant head.

domestic shrines and temples. The literary concepts and repertoire of themes were of course common, belonging to common fund of religious imagery, but when it came to their artistic depiction, the paths diverged. This divergence is not what one would have expected, and calls for an explanation.

It is tempting to postulate that from the very beginning there were two classes of carvers, one in stone, the other in wood. Wood carving is, of course, the much older tradition, but stone carving, when it did arise in temples, did not follow the wooden tradition but a different one. It is just possible that the stone carver was originally a carver of ivory or a jeweller (this point has indeed been already



Fig. 57. Each strut has a floral S-shaped design. At the base of each strut are human figures in sets of three.

mentioned by Sir John Marshall in his analysis of the sculptures on the gateways of Sanchi<sup>24</sup>) and this would adequately explain the difference in style. But this assumption raises another interesting problem. If ivory carvers or jewellers executed stone carvings, who executed stone construction, because the former could never have produced the latter. The answer seems to be, that it was the carpenter who, already knowledgeable in construction, also undertook stone construction and this would also in one stroke explain why stone structural detailing resembles that in wood, but stone carving does not resemble wood carving. In other words, in structural matters the carpenter reigned supreme, whereas in carvings two different sets of artisans were employed, one in



stone, the other in wood. The artisan who executed wood carving may have been simultaneously also the carpenter who executed the construction; in fact this seems extremely likely, so that for woodwork we have a single class of artisans for both carvings and construction. But in stone we have two classes, one the carpenter executing construction, the other the carver who worked independently. This is also proved by the fact that stone carvings on temples are generally done on separate stone slabs which form a mere outer covering to structure underneath. The assumption of there being two distinct classes of carvers would also explain why stone carved figures have a greater elegance and sophistication when compared to those in wood, which are almost rustic.

There is one other aspect of the above problem, namely patronage. Stone temples are not densely concentrated in urban areas but are scattered all over a region in distant locations. To construct such a temple, one might find local carpenters but one would not necessarily find local stone carvers, because the patronage for the former was far greater than for the latter so that a patron would have to call in stone carvers from distant towns to execute work on a temple. The Hindu or Jain temple shares an all-India character with only minor deviations due to local influences, so that the stone carver would have to produce work of an all-India or at least larger regional character. In fact, one does indeed find this: sculptures from, say, Khajuraho are very similar to those from within Gujarat or Rajasthan, i. e. there is a discernible all-India character about them. This is not so in wood carving.

The carpenter finds so much local demand that there is no need for him to travel elsewhere for patronage, i. e. his work inevitably shows a very local, restricted character which is naturally reflected in his style of carving and which is bound to be sufficiently different from

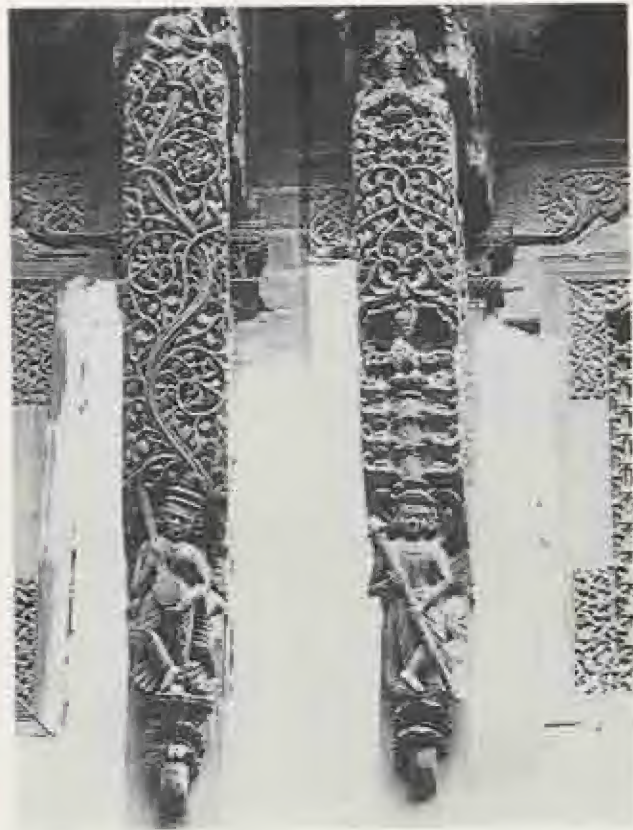


Fig. 58. Details of carved strut with human figures at the top and bottom. Figures at the top are musicians or birds. Figures at the bottom hold the rising vine, staff or a musical instrument.

that in a neighbouring town. One can put this phenomenon differently. Temple art had to exhibit courtly, aristocratic, all-India characteristics. Whereas wood carving of necessity remained domestic, commercial and folk-oriented. This is particularly true of Gujarat. The wealthy patrons of wood carving in Gujarat were drawn from urbanised mercantile classes which, despite their urbanisation, retained very strong rustic, folkish, down-to-earth life-styles and this is reflected in the architecture and the arts (for more detailed description see my earlier book.). Had the aristocratic, feudal element dominated, the picture would have been quite different.





Fig.59. Intricately carved strut with figures at the bottom. The male figures wear Marathi turbans, have caste mark on their forehead and their features are sharp (top left).

Fig.60. Close-up bottom of a strut. A figure standing on a lotus-pedestal has a rising Vine in his hands. The leaves of the plant are little broader than the stem (top right).

Fig.61. Close-up of twin struts at fig. 59 stylised Vidyadharas are holding staff and rising vine respectively. Finely incised floral patterns are not similar (bottom left).



### III

## STYLISTIC ASPECTS

It is useful at the outset to make a brief comparison of Gujarati woodwork with that of other important woodworking regions in order to know whether Gujarati work is indeed a self-contained style, or whether it is part of a wider inter-related type. The principal areas of the sub-continent where wood carving was common were : Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Nepal, parts of South India, and Gujarat. Not enough has been published of these regional carvings so that a thorough comparison can be made, but enough is known to be able to distinguish them. Plus, there are the opinions of experts who were familiar with all these styles. It should be emphasised that since Gujarati wood carving was mainly architectural, it is architectural woodwork which we are comparing, and not furniture, utensils and similar objects.

The best illustrations of Indian woodwork have appeared in the following publications : *Indian Art, Technical Art Series*, which began in 1886; *Art in Industry, Monograph Series*, published between 1895-97; *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*, published from 1886 onwards; *Indian Art at Delhi*, being the official catalogue of the 1903 exhibition held there; *Art Manufacturers of India*, the catalogue for the International Exhibition at Glasgow in 1888; *Jeypore Portfolio of Architectural Details*,

published in 1890; *Rupam*, a journal published from 1922 onwards; *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba*, published in 1955; *Deccan Woodwork*, published in 1967; *Glimpses of Nepal Woodwork*, published in 1968-69; *The Kathmandu Valley Towns*, published in 1974; *The Art and Architecture of Himachal Pradesh*, published in

Fig. 62. A close-up of another stylised *Vidyadhara* with a staff. The costume is a dhoti with great, flaring ends swirling out behind.





1983; and the *Gujarat Census Volume* already cited.

It is not feasible to illustrate woodwork of other regions in order to prove their difference to Gujarat, but our own comparative observations have clearly indicated this, plus some analysis given below will help explain it. The experts who wrote the above publications are also of assistance in documenting these differences.

The pre-eminence of wood carving in Gujarat as compared to the rest of India can be judged from the following. B. A. Gupte, writing on Wood Carving in general in 1886, says, "As far, at least, as Western India is concerned, that art of wood carving for architectural purposes most assuredly belongs to the Gujaratis." <sup>25</sup> H. E. M. James, describing a wooden screen which he had specially prepared for himself, wrote in 1894, "wood-carving in Gujarat has been practised by the Hindus from time immemorial . . . carving in that part of the country seems a born instinct, even with the lowest carpenter, and in the remotest villages." <sup>26</sup> It would thus appear that Gujarati wood carving was indeed something special – which confirms our own conclusions.

For a stylistic comparison we begin with a quote from M. F. O' Dwyer dated 1890 in which he was comparing woodwork of Punjab with that of the Himalayan area around Simla; he had noticed the similarity between the Himalayan area and Gujarat and the difference with Punjab, and could write, " . . . square pillars, chamfered or fluted into octagonal or circular shapes, and crowned by bracket capitals, – the elements of a form highly elaborated in wood in Gujarat . . . but it is scarcely ever seen in the Punjab plains . . ." <sup>27</sup> Here the difference between Punjab and Gujarat is plainly brought out. An illustration of door details from the Golden Temple at Amritsar shows a panelled shutter never seen in typical Gujarati work <sup>28</sup>. Percy Brown has an

illustration of a doorway from Lahore belonging to the 16th Century A. D. which is quite distinct from Gujarati doors – the former clearly showing its Islamic origins. <sup>29</sup>

Sir George Watt, author of the exhibition catalogue of *Indian Art at Delhi*, wrote, "The Sikh art is but a recent adaptation from the Muhammadan . . ." <sup>30</sup> and he continues, "Most towns in the province (Punjab), however, possess fine old doors of Hindu origin which carry down to us decorative designs that existed long anterior to the introduction of the Muhammadan style." <sup>30</sup> Now, this is a very bold statement to make because none of these houses can possibly pre-date Muslim conquest of the Punjab but even if the designs are Hindu, the illustrations show a style quite different from the Gujarati: the Punjabi door has flat, shallow carvings, while the Gujarati has heavy ledges and battens with deep incisions, and mouldings.

Regarding Rajasthan he writes, "It is significant that in none of the palaces of the princes and nobles of Rajputana and central India, are there examples of fine old wood-carving." <sup>31</sup> However, from the illustrations of doors in this work as also elsewhere, one can see a resemblance in the carpentry of the shutters, and this is not surprising because there existed close artistic contacts between Gujarat and Rajasthan. But the similarity in woodwork is found only in the carpentry, not in the sphere of carving. The shutters of, for example, the famous Amber Palaces built about 1630 A. D., are made of stone and ivory and marble, using wooden carpentry detailing, but the carvings have a filigree character more related to silversmith and goldsmith rather than to wood carving. A glance at the illustrations in the *Jeypore Portfolio* will prove this. <sup>32</sup>

On Nepal, Watt wrote, "The examination of Nepal woodwork first suggests the observation of its strongly Chinese feelings; then its curious practice of superimposing structural features . . . the strutted roof-supports





Fig. 63. Jamb of a domestic shrine. The strip of carving consists of a particular motif repeated endlessly all the way up.

... a frieze of lion heads ... border or wavy line of serpents ... for which there is no parallel in the wood-work of India." <sup>33</sup> George Watt is not quite accurate in all his observations: struts are characteristic of both Nepal and Gujarat, i. e. the carpentry is similar in this respect, but the carvings are not, as he rightly points out. The most spectacular woodwork in Nepal appears in windows, balconies and door-frames. Doorframes have a series of superimposed thin lintels quite unlike Gujarati work, while the jambs are fretted into superimposed ridges. The thinness of wooden members used is the opposite of the heaviness of Gujarati work, and

the carving of friezes, window grills, etc., bear no resemblance to the latter. The only very curious point of decorative resemblance is in the presence of small pendants forming a fringe to fascia boards, but then this feature also appears in Himachal Pradesh, and seems to be a Himalayan feature also found in Gujarat <sup>34</sup>. This is discussed further on.

Kashmir is, unfortunately, not sufficiently illustrated in any publication for any definitive conclusion, but the meager evidence seems to indicate that Kashmiri wood carving concentrated on furniture and utensils rather

Fig. 64. Tapering column decorated with human figures and a cusped arch in a domestic shrine.





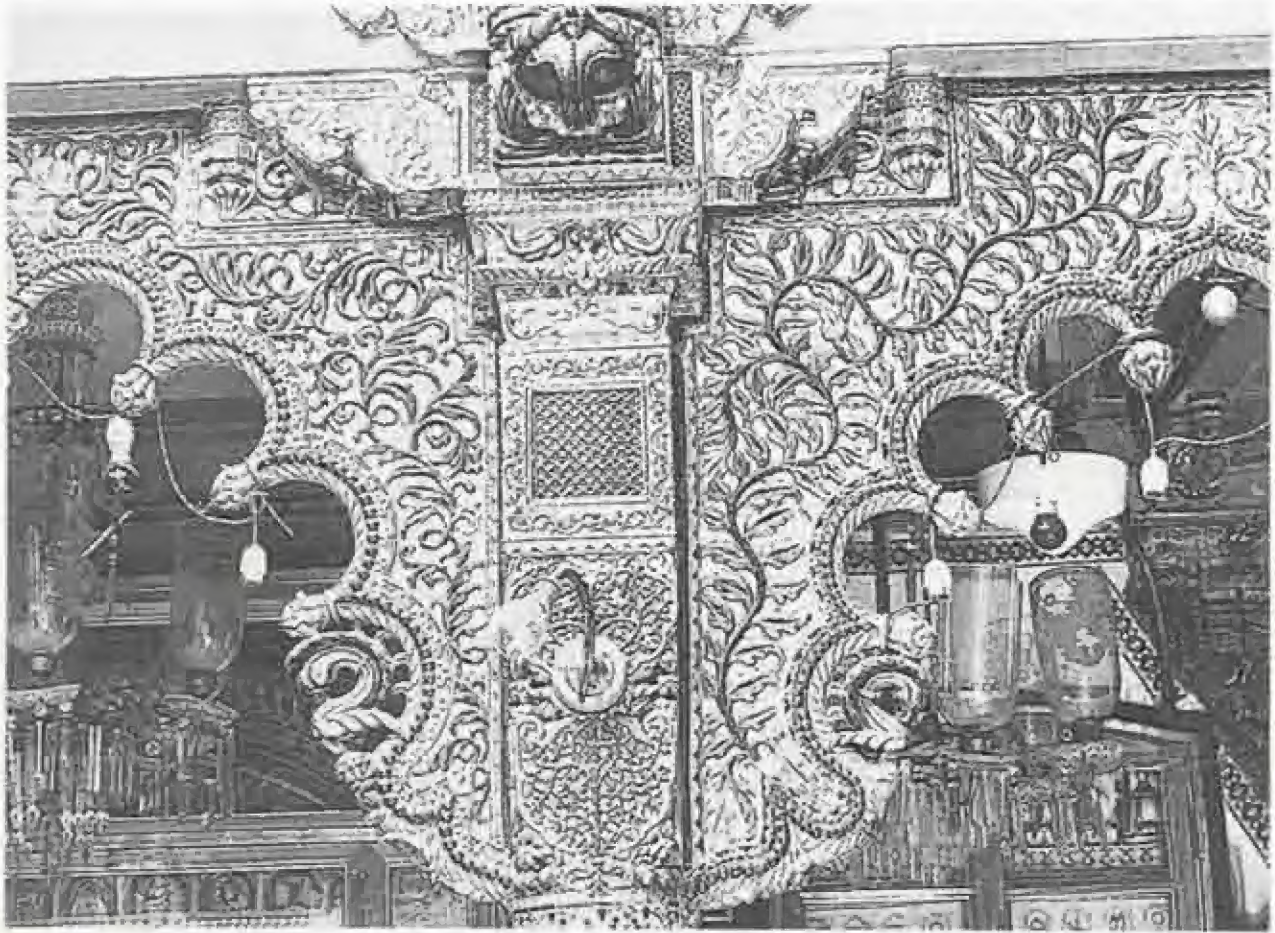


Fig.65. Cusped arches added to the columns and capitals giving dazzling effect.

than on the architecture.

The illustrations from South India show doors which, in Mysore, Madras and Bellary, have panelled shutters which at once distinguishes them from Gujarati work, while the carvings are eclectic. However, there are doors from Bijapur, made of planks, heavy ledges and battens, the latter carved in a style reminiscent of Gujarat, so that we have here clear affinities.<sup>27</sup> The relationship between Bijapur and Gujarat is discussed further on as there are other mutual influences.

The Deccan, more precisely Maharashtra, has very close affinity in its woodwork to that of Gujarat, but the reason is that it is Gujarati workmen who were employed

in centres such as Nasik, Ahmednagar, Jalna, Aurangabad, etc., and reproduced Gujarati carvings for their new patrons. M. S. Mate noticed this similarity but was not sure about the reasons.<sup>28</sup> This aspect is discussed more extensively below.

The last region to be compared is Himachal Pradesh; it was left until the last because here we have very interesting similarities in the woodwork. The most remarkable feature is that the stone houses of Himachal Pradesh employ bonding timbers in exactly the same manner as that of Gujarat. Much of the wood carving also has a similar folkish character, and although this region has come under many other influences as well, one of them is certainly Gujarat. Buildings have the





Fig.66. Another arch in a Jain temple with very deep cusps, with large birds forming its termination.

Gujarat<sup>37</sup>. In this connection, the art historian Hermann Goetz has a very interesting theory that Gujarati artisans emigrated to areas of North India to fill the artistic vacuum produced by the devastation of Muslim invasions in the 13th and 14th centuries A. D.<sup>38</sup> They even penetrated Kumaon and thus introduced Gujarati influence there. He adds, "In palace architecture the gates built by Raja Maldev at Jodhpur fort and Merta repeat the type of Dabhoi, Jhinjuwada, Junagadh, Gumli, Pawagadh, etc. . . . In Man Singh's palace at Gwalior Gujarati elements are likewise in strong evidence."<sup>39</sup>

Goetz then turns to Gujarati influence in the Deccan. "But Gujarati wood sculpture was to win another sphere of influence :

Maharashtra." Thus the Gujarati wood style proved easily adaptable for the embellishment of the Maratha palaces, and thus figural brackets, which first the Solanki artists had created and which had temporarily found their way also into early Rajput temple sculpture, were now introduced into Maratha art, especially in the area of and north of Poona . . . And in the course of the Maratha political influence the Gujarati wood style also reached famous places of pilgrimage in other parts of India."<sup>40</sup> What this means is that, far from Gujarati woodwork being influenced from outside, it was Gujarat which influenced many other parts of India. We find Goetz's view largely correct, because the Gujarati (and Rajasthani) craftsmen have always been so





Fig.67. An entrance door with double tollas placed above each other - the lower one is carved as an elephant head, the upper one has recessed planes.

famous that their services might easily have been borrowed by patrons further afield. That some of them entered the service of princess as far away as Kumaon is very likely; their influence on Fatehpur Sikri is unmistakable; the only difference being that while Rajasthan specialised only in stone carving, Gujarat had both stone and wood carving.

There are however important exceptions to this, namely that in some elements of woodwork in Gujarat outside influence is clearly discernible, and these are:

(a) **The Carved Ceiling :** The carved ceiling appears in many of the richer houses

in Gujarat, presenting a flat background with superimposed designs of a floral or geometrical character derived from Islamic carpets. Similar stone ceilings are found at Fatehpur Sikri, but the earliest in wood are in some of the palaces in Bijapur, so that the immediate source seems to be Bijapur.

(b) **The Arched Panel :** The arched panel is a purely decorative feature inserted between the upper portions of columns, and is locally called a *kaman*. Such *kamans* are the rule in Mughal architecture; it is also common in the Deccan; and frequently it has a cusped outline. This feature,





Fig. 68. Details of the *tolla* shows circular ribbed disc at its lower end (top left).

Fig. 69. Close-up of the *tolla* with more details (top right)

Fig. 70. View of twin column and twin struts of the verandah. The manner of joinery the proportion and the carvings are of classical purity (bottom left).





Fig.71: Details of twin strut and twin column. The column becomes square in the upper range in order to provide abutment for the strut

translated into wood, is thus also of Islamic derivation.

(c) **The Tapering Column :** This is again borrowed from Mughal architecture, along with the manner of its carving, and in Gujarat it generally appears in upper floors and balconies where its load-bearing requirement was minimal.

(d) **The European/West Asian Influence :** The trading links of Gujarat with West Asia and Europe inevitably led to certain foreign influences appearing in former. One major influence from West Asia was in the all-wood frontage found in Patan and Ahmedabad, along with its floral carvings. The other was in flat balustrades (as opposed to the traditional curvilinear) covered with floral or geometrical patterns of carving.

European influence has been documented by John Irwin who writes that with increasing trade in textiles, it was found that traditional Indian designs were not favoured in Europe, and merchants began sending out European patterns to be copied in Gujarat for export<sup>41</sup>. Many of these patterns were floral, and one can see them repeated in wood carving, especially in Saurashtra. Other designs arose from seeing examples in European buildings coming up in centres such as Goa or Bombay. One can see beautifully executed Corinthian capitals in some of the Gujarati houses. The greatest mixture of European and Gujarati motifs occurs in rich Vohra houses—these were merchants with wide-ranging

Fig.72: Details from the carved, pierced panel located between the shafts of the twin columns. This is an introduction of a non-structural element into the structure.





It can thus be seen that designs in wood carving were subject to a two-way process, with local tradition dominating till about 1850 A. D.; thereafter a hybrid style became common all over Gujarat.

### Styles in Gujarat

As mentioned, Gujarat has three main sub-divisions : North Gujarat, Saurashtra, and South Gujarat. The dominant style of woodwork and wood carving was that of North Gujarat; it was sought to be imitated elsewhere because of its superior quality. It has the greatest repertoire of motifs-floral, geometric, figural - and a variety of forms within each category. Figural work is specially

prominent in this region. Among figural motifs, the most common were: *vidyadhars* and *apsaras* holding musical instruments; figures of armed retainers; Ganesha over door lintels; friezes of elephant heads; birds; horse-shaped wall pegs; erotic couples; mythical composite beasts.

Floral meanders, scrolls and arabesques appeared mostly on door lintels, upper frontages, balconies, lighter beams and some carved ceilings.

Geometrical patterns appeared on flat balustrades to balconies; on carved ceilings, and column faces.

Within this North Gujarat styles, there is an identifiable Islamic influence, particularly in

Fig.73. This is a balcony of Vohra house at ground floor for socialising. It has elaborate carvings with the most extraordinary variety of designs. This shows clearly European design. The carvings are very finely executed and never repeated in Gujarat.



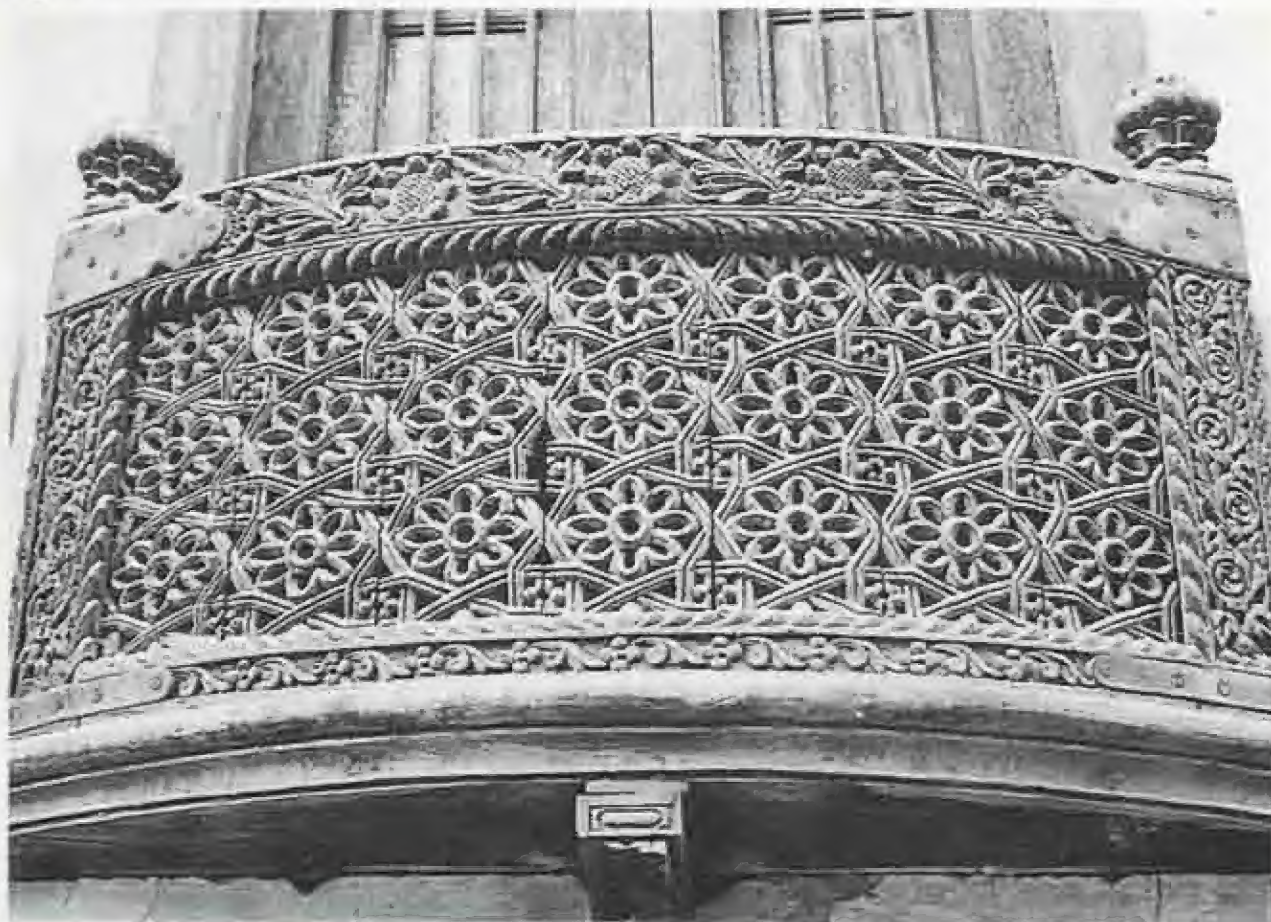


some balconies and carved ceilings. The traditional Gujarati balcony balustrade was curvilinear; however, in many houses this was flat in shape, and the surface was evenly covered with a floral or geometrical pattern resembling stone carving. This is no longer a linear pattern characteristic for wood, but a surface pattern closer to textile design. The carved ceiling, as already mentioned, had also a predominantly geometrical pattern with a floral border resembling carpet design. Both these Islamic designs were found indiscriminately distributed among Hindu and Jain houses as well, i.e. there was no sectarian feeling about them. However, in Muslim houses figural work was forbidden due to religious reasons, and alternative designs were employed. For example, the frieze of elephant

heads was replaced by a row of droplets, often arranged in tiers. These droplets were adapted from Hindu or Jain carvings and were merely put to a novel use, so that this is not an Islamic design but simply non-figural. The manner in which the local artisan could quickly adjust himself to new circumstances is quite remarkable, but this adjustment involved rearrangement of already known parts or motifs; they were not new invention. Other examples of such an adjustment are mentioned below.

In the area in Ahmedabad and surrounding towns, there was for some time an influx of administrators from Rajasthan appointed by the Mughal court, and the legacy of this was the introduction of armed retainers

Fig.74. Another balcony of a Vohra house. The surface is carved with very refined geometric and floral pattern.





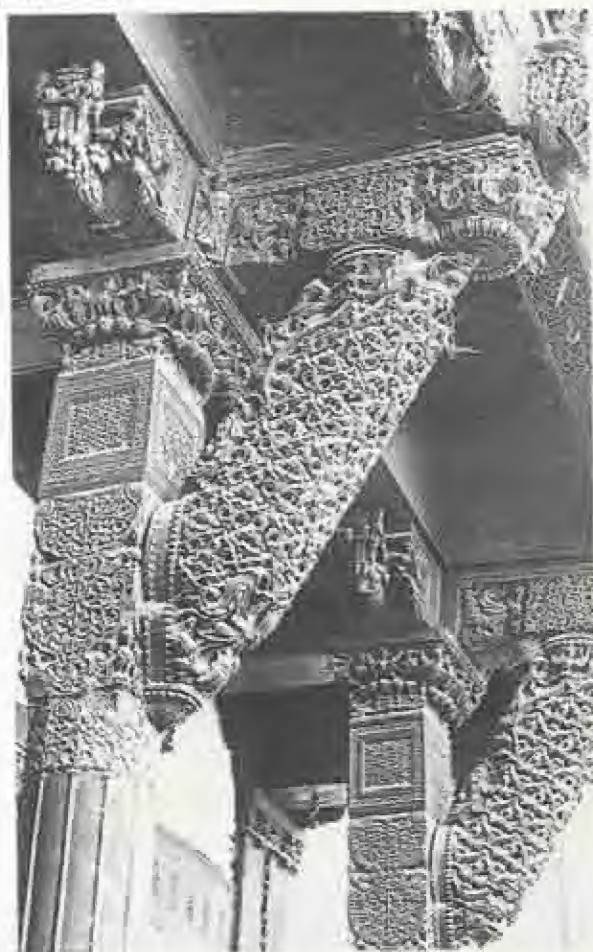


Fig.75. A strut with very complex carving spread over the whole rounded surface. There is a mesh of plants with stylized birds enclosed within tendrils.

in the carvings, wearing Rajasthani costume. In Baroda and its environs, where the Maratha rule was later established, we find figures in Maratha costume. It was not that Rajasthani or Maratha artisans were brought in to execute such work; it was the indigenous Gujarati carver who had produced them to suit changed circumstances. But even so, the skill in which such extraneous features were introduced seems to show that certain models must have existed which were simply copied. Now, there did exist a class of artisans who were experts in making toy-like figures in clay and wood, and these faithfully represented ethnic characteristics; it seems that these could have served as ready-



Fig.76. Close-up of the upper part of the column in figure 75.

made models for wood carvers in Gujarat.

One very prolific and traditional source of motifs for Gujarat was embroidery. It has been noted by many scholars that embroidery is a household occupation among certain nomadic castes, particularly in Saurashtra, and embroidered articles were used by all communities as wall-hangings, dowry goods, *toranas* above doorways, etc. These embroideries contain a wealth of motifs, specially floral patterns, animals, birds, human figures, all executed in a crude, folkish style, and one can immediately notice the similarity between them and the motifs in wood carving. In particular, the juxtaposition of human





Fig. 77. A close-up of the carved column at the joint of the strut in figure 75.

figures and birds, the Ganesha on toranas, the archaic costumes—all these appear in both wood carving and embroidery with great frequency.<sup>42</sup>

The above, then, constituted the North Gujarat style of wood carving. Its elements, once seen, are unmistakable. Fragments of the style reappear in distant parts of Gujarat as imitations of a dominant style.

The second sub-division, Saurashtra, has certain peculiarities. Woodwork has always been more scarce, partly on account of the greater distances involved, but more due to the relative poverty of the region which could not afford to import timber on the scale of North Gujarat. In addition, local stone was available for construction, providing a ready alternative

to wood. Another alternative decorative material was stucco, which was employed to produce designs which rivalled wood carving in intricacy but not in richness of motifs. However, wood carving remained the preferred material for carving as many of the surviving old palaces show.

The other peculiarity of Saurashtra is that it shows the greatest amount of foreign influence in the wood carving. One reason could be that the region was nearest to West Asia and Europe, and hence more accessible to such influence. But a stronger reason was that Saurashtra entered into a phase of urban development much later than North Gujarat, i. e. it began to urbanise at a time when foreign influence had already begun to dominate the whole of Gujarat—particularly colonial influence. Colonial influence was specially effective in feudal states, which comprised the whole of Saurashtra, whereas North Gujarat was mercantile. Saurashtra is full of old feudal palaces, called *darbargadhs*, in which woodwork (as also other decorative parts) shows a very hybrid, eclectic style with large-scale borrowings from European motifs so much so, that one can hardly speak of a Saurashtra style at all.

As an example of European influence, there are column capitals which imitate Corinthian; there are floral motifs which resemble European tapestry, made with raised portions producing a three-dimensional effect.

One further strong influence in Saurashtra came from Rajasthan. The feudal princes of Saurashtra sought to reproduce an aristocratic life-style whose model was taken from the leading Rajput princes of Rajasthan (then called Rajputana). Thus, wherever possible, elements were borrowed from the stone architecture of Rajput palaces.

The third sub-division, South Gujarat, can be largely ignored in so far as wood carving is



Fig.78. Detail of the entrance door. It is made up of plants with a heavy overlay of ledges and battens rivetted on to them. The ledges and battens are carved into alternating squares.



Fig.79. Details of upper part of the entrance door at figure 78. The twin birds appear at the top of the shutters. The carving gives a three dimensional effect. (bottom).







Fig.80. A close view of the corner of an entrance of the house.

Fig.81. A close view of ledges and batten of a front door.





Fig. 82. A part of a balcony balustrade. The motif is of a mythical creature spouting plant. It is a rampant elephant with foliage spoutling from its mouth (fig. 82 & a stylized bird with a foliage held in its beak - fig. 83)

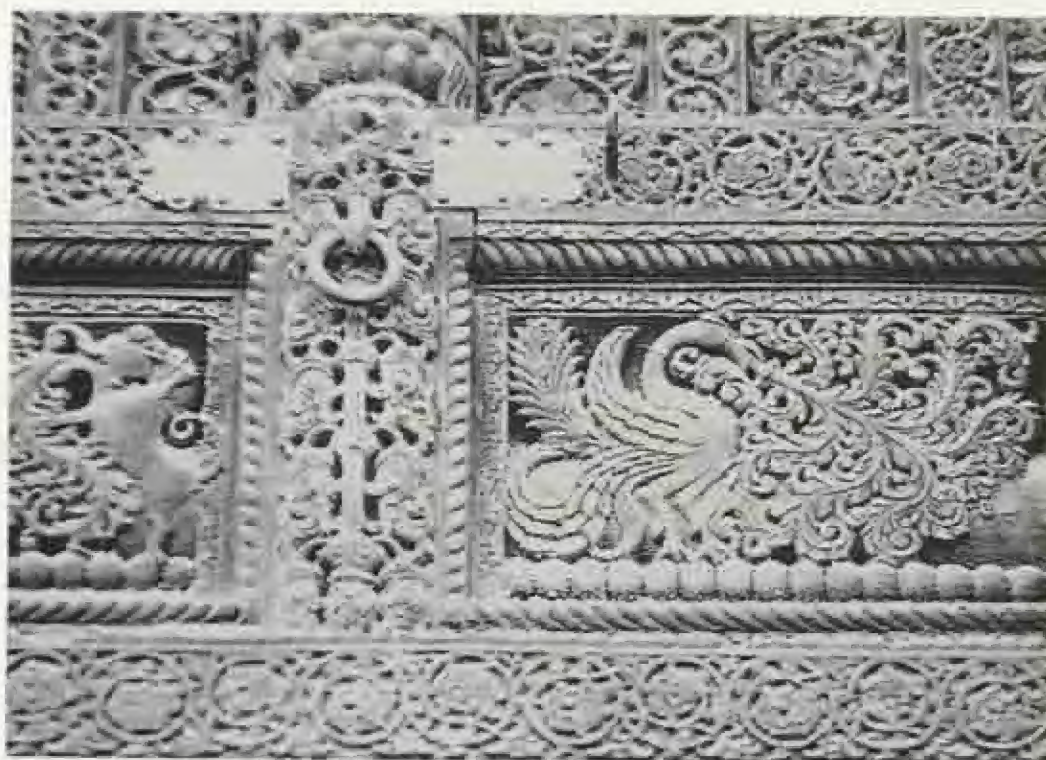


Fig. 83. View of the balustrade forming part of the haveli elevation. In this curvilinear balustrade, part of the carving was done when the surface was still flat. This kind of ornate treatment and the theme of parrots entwined with potted plants is a peculiarity of Ahmedabad.





Fig.84. One of the most richly carved houses in Ahmedabad shows part of the main elevation. There are curvilinear balustrade, panelled wooden frontage with supporting columns carrying struts and long windows. The top floor has tapering columns with metal balustrade.

concerned, because it is hardly of any significance. The exception is a famous Jain haveli-temple.

Having described the general styles of wood carving, it remains to examine whether there was any development of style over a period of time, i. e. whether there is any historical development. A comparison of wood carving, in an example dated with certainty to the late 16th century A. D. (a Jain temple now with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) with other Jain temples of the 19th century A. D., shows that no significant change has occurred: the same style persists, with even the themes and artistic conventions remaining constant. It is true in the case of residences too. One should perhaps not be surprised at the lack of change: the Hindu or Jain temples did not change over centuries. The only changes which could be

observed are recorded below.

As mentioned, all the older buildings showed in general a lack of decorative display. For example, we saw the two houses belonging to the wealthy family of Sureshwar Desai in Baroda in which the older one had few carvings and these too were less intricate as compared to those in the later one. It was not a growth in prosperity which resulted in a greater display of carvings, but a growth in urban security. The most richly carved houses were built after about 1850 A. D.

The increase in decorative display naturally brought with it greater intricacy of carvings. Where a curvilinear balcony would, in an older house, have carvings only on rails, uprights, and central parts of the balustrade, in a later one the whole curvilinear surface





Fig.85. A view of the ground-floor column. A part of the shaft has flat faces. The strut has depression along its lateral surface. It has variant foliage design resembling creepers and a bud.

would now be covered in a minute pattern. Struts, which would have a simple floral design, later became a mass of complicated, eclectic motifs with mythical creatures enmeshed in a tangle of plants.

A third and final stage was reached when motifs borrowed from colonial sources began to influence design. Ultimately this foreign influence completely overwhelmed indigenous tradition with the greatest of ease. It documents the fact that patrons of the arts were never really supporting tradition out of an intellectual conviction, but merely because there was, earlier, nothing else to choose from. Once colonial novelties became available, they were accepted in a rush without any understanding of their cultural background.



Fig.86. A close view of the shaft and a strut shown in figure 84.

Before listing the wooden members which were traditionally carved, and giving their analysis, it is necessary to show a traditional Gujarati house plan and its section, in order to locate these parts.

### Parts of the Traditional House

The traditional urban house has three main divisions : a front portion consisting of a front veranda (called *otlo*) and an entrance hall (called *khudki*). This hall was, in many cases, used as a shop by traders, as a place to receive clients, or as a workshop by artisans. Formal visitors would not be allowed beyond it.

The next portion consisted of a central courtyard (called *chowk*) with a running passage on three sides (called *raveshi*), and on





Fig.87. A close view of the balustrade. It consists of human figures on the uprights, standing upon potted plants and on either side of the motif of the mythical creature are spouting plants. The figure is playing a sitar (figure 87 above) and playing a flute - (figure 88 below).

Fig.88. The human figure on the balustrade is playing a flute.





the fourth, smaller chambers were used for cooking, water storage, and prayer.

At the back was, first a long hall (called *parsal*), followed by twin rooms (called *ordo*). These were the private areas of the house. Only intimate visitors and family relatives were normally allowed to enter it. The *parsal* was used by women for their daily chores and for sleeping at night by the family. The *ordos* were originally used for cooking, for sleeping by females, storage, and more intimate functions. But after the appearance of the kitchen in the courtyard, the *ordo* lost its original function and became an alternative sleeping area and storage.

The upper floors were originally insignificant, used for accommodating visitors, growing children, etc., but later, with an

increasingly wealthy clientele, in some houses the room above the *khaḍki* was converted into a very elegant and richly decorated reception room called *divankhannu*.

The parts of the house which were carved were: the *otlo*, the areas around the courtyard (but not the three small chambers to the left), some parts of the *parsal*. The *parsal* had noticeably less carving than the *otlo* and courtyard. The manner in which carving were distributed revealed a very significant social aspect about decoration. Decoration was maximum in those parts which were the locus of gatherings or were specially visible to visitors. The frontage of the house naturally took preference before all else, because the house front proclaimed the status of the family. The

Fig.89 A close view of balustrade shows plants emanating from the feet of a bird and terminating in elephant-headed lions.







Fig.90. Fully rounded and three - dimensional figural struts of the top floor. The figures are winged. They wear fantastic head gear, are richly jewelled and costumed.

courtyard was the locus for family gatherings at marriages, festivals, ceremonies, and carried decoration almost as rich as the front because that area also contributed to the status. The *parsal*, being mainly used for socialising by women, was more modestly decorated. The rooms which carried virtually no decoration were those meant for strictly private use: the *ordos*, the kitchen, the prayer room. The *kludki*, a commercial area, was bare. In other words, traditional decoration was not for private enjoyment or even as an adjunct to ordinary commerce: it was for the creation of social status



Fig.91. A strut showing divine *vidyadhari* carrying musical instrument.

among visitors, i. e. it was for display.

The upper floor *divankhanu* became a centre for display only when business itself depended upon display for success. This occurred when the owner dealt in items which were meant for a rich class of clients and who expected opulent surroundings. The ordinary shopkeeper was under no such pressure.

The attitude to decoration analysed above bears a very striking similarity to that witnessed in temples. The innermost sanctum (called *garbha griha*), where the image is installed, is



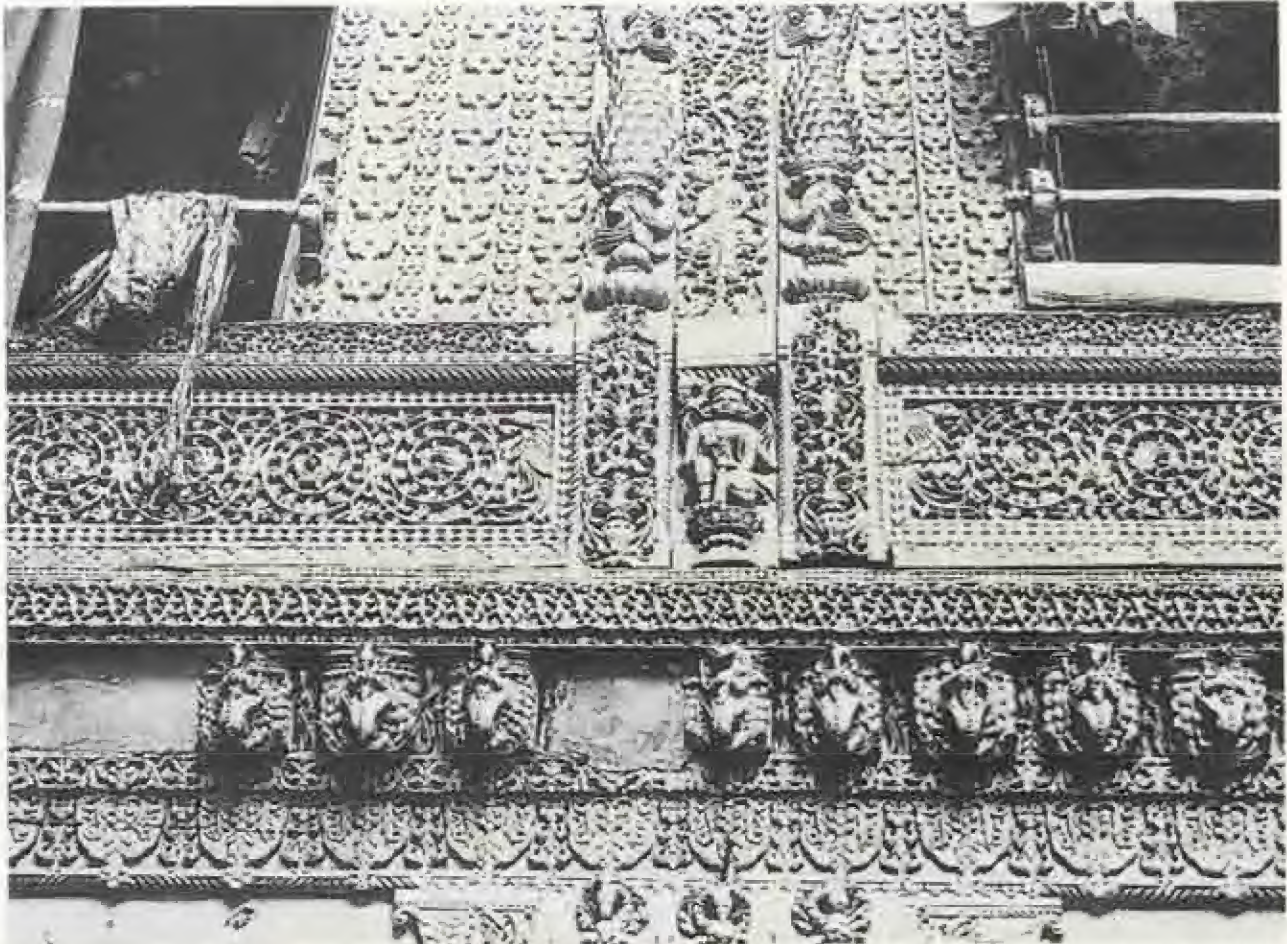


Fig. 92. Part of rear elevation with flat balustrade. The floral meander is in the coils, beginning from a pot at the centre.

always bare of decoration; whereas decoration is prolific in all those areas accessible to visitors and in frontages. The absence of decoration in the sanctum has always puzzled the art-historian, but once the domestic house is examined, the reason stands revealed. In fact, it seems to me that the *garbha griha* was actually modelled on the lines of *ordo* : both chambers have no windows, are bare of decoration, have very high doorsills, single entrances, and function as very private chambers. But that is another discussion which does not belong here.

The following list of carved woodwork is made to avoid repetition of each description when the various parts are illustrated. For each kind of carved member, its general characteristics are described, so that when

individual examples are illustrated, then one needs to only add the particular distinguishing marks of that specimen.

### List of Carved Members

#### 1. Doors

The door of a Gujarati house has a very special significance in the overall architectural context : it is that feature which symbolises the status of the family in the most concentrated manner. If the owner of a house had no resources to carve most of his woodwork, he was under a social compulsion to at least carve his entrance door. The importance of doors can be gauged from the fact that in the *Shilpa texts*, many chapters are devoted to their qualities. The door also seems to have had ritual significance, because it was through this



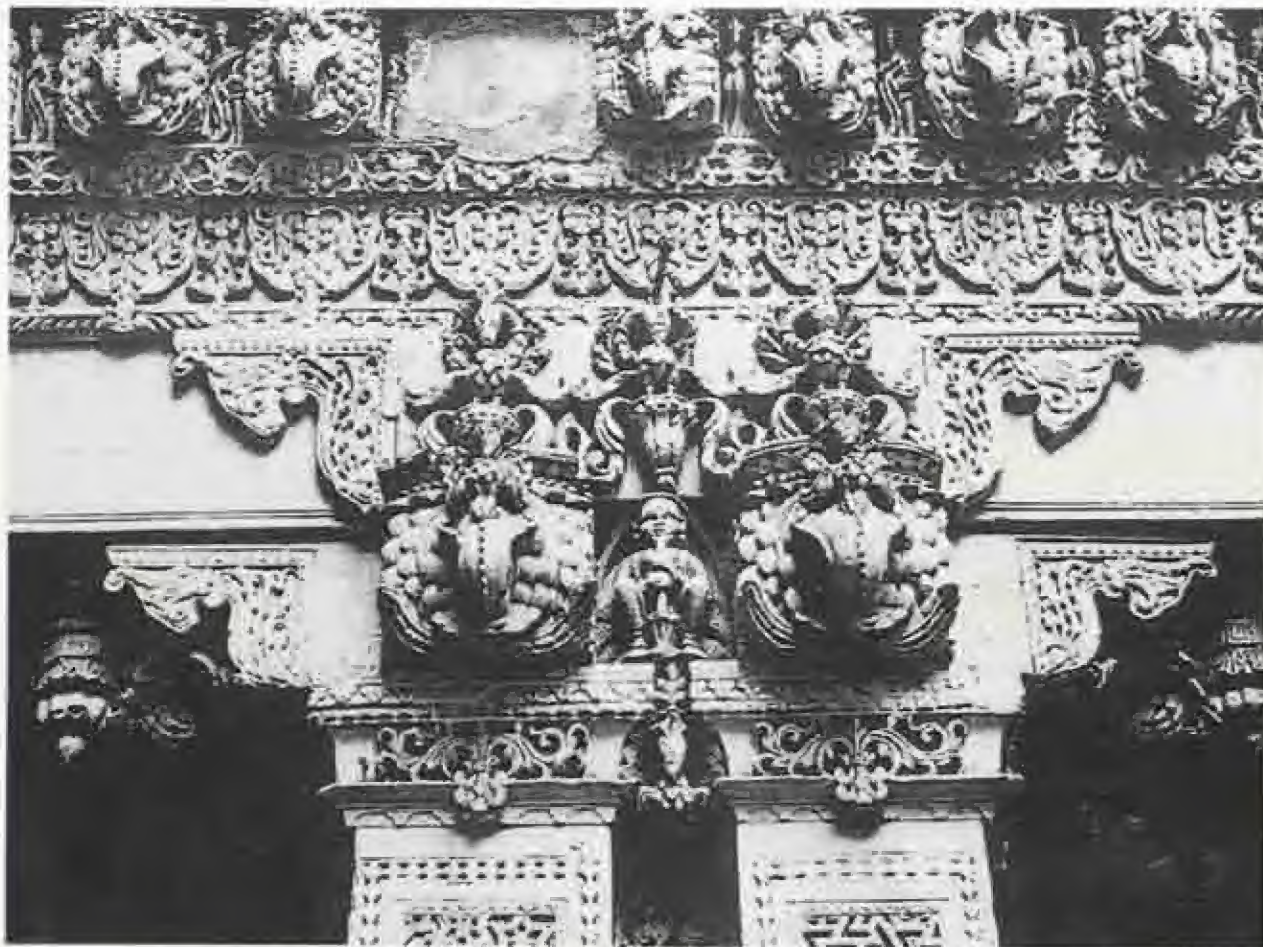


Fig.93. A junction of twin columns with twin bracket capitals, formed into elephant heads. Above them are three peacocks with flaring tails, flanked by decorative profiles nailed to the beam. A tiny figure of an ascetic seated in a hut is also seen.

entrance that evil influences could penetrate the house. There exists a custom even today in which traders hang up a string of leaves over the house entrance at ceremonial occasions, and paint signs on the wall at either side. It was in pursuance of this ancient custom that door lintels carried auspicious symbols, for examples either the image of a Ganesha or a vase of plenty (*purnaghata*), flanked by floral meanders. The ritual significance of carved lintels is further discussed later on.

The typical Gujarati door consisted of two massive jambs in front, one at the back, double lintels, a high sill, and pivoted shutters. In addition, the door had a peculiar saddle-shaped projecting piece of wood at each upper corner, called a *tolla*, which was characteristic

of Gujarat and is found nowhere else in India. The shutters were made of planks held together by ledges and battens which were spiked to the former.

The most heavily carved portion of the door was the lintels; tollas were rarely carved. The jambs also were generally left plain, in keeping with general carpentry practice of not carving main structural members (lintels are an exception). However, the tops of jambs were capped by small capitals which were carved like column capitals, in some cases, these jamb capitals were surmounted by bracket-capitals which projected far inwards, interfering with the shutters. To accommodate the inward projections, each shutter was cut away at the upper corner in a very awkward manner,



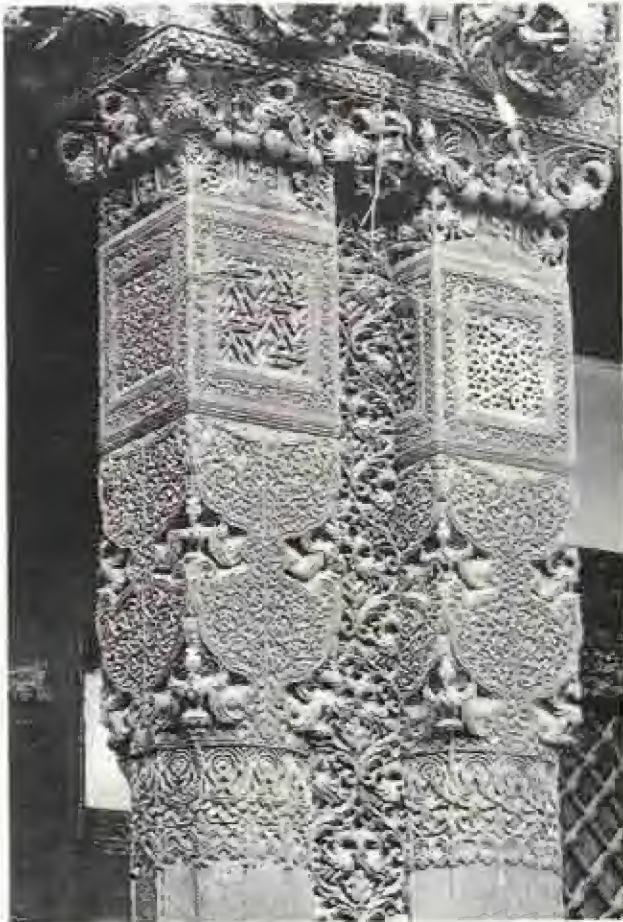


Fig. 94. A view of the front of twin columns with a carved panel set in between. The shaft flutings branch out into floral abstractions and superimposed above them are inverted petals with a central bud.



Fig. 95. A view of courtyard columns with bare faces just above the rounded shaft. The top of the rounded part of the shaft has only the petal and bud motif without complications.

producing poor carpentry but visually effective. (Fig. 1,2)

The ledges and battens of the shutters, as also the vertical cover bead, were carved with rosettes alternating with geometrical forms; in the centre of each flower was a large spike driven through to the underlying planks, thus harmonising a structural feature with the design.

The rear portions of door frames and shutters were never carved, because they were never seen by visitors. These rear views of bare planks, with the turned-in points of spikes, were ugly in appearance, yet they caused no aesthetic discomfort to the owner simply because they

were not visible to visitors. This contrast between front and back says a great deal regarding the function of decoration.

## 2. Columns

The typical Gujarati column has the following parts : the base, usually of stone, but sometimes also of wood, carved in a manner so as to transform its square form into a circle to match the shaft, and having floral motifs, plus a projecting circlet at the junction with the shaft; above the base is a circular shaft with flutings, but the circular form changes into a square with four faces at the upper end in order to form abutments for struts. Since these struts are always carved, the abutting face also shares



in the carving, and its abutting profile has to exactly fit onto the face of the column, and the carving on this column face has to match the abutting profile of the strut - a complicated junction which was not always successful. Part of the square faces are carved in geometrical patterns of flowers. Above the shaft is a capital, square in shape, modestly carved with dentils of fringes of leaves; above it is a bracket-capital consisting of three or four arms, each arm is curved upwards in a double curve producing a very elegant profile. This profile is characteristic of North Gujarat and distinguishes it from that of Saurashtra where the bracket-capitals are shallow and less elegant.

The rounded column shafts appear only in free-standing columns; where the column is attached to a wall in the interior, it is always flat. (Figs 3 a & 3 b, 4, 5 )

### 3. Struts

Struts are those short members which diagonally join columns to extended arms of bracket-capitals, which in turn support cantilevers of upper floors. It is on struts that the imagination of the carver has run riot. In the more sedate versions, the strut is slightly rounded on all sides and covered with a fine floral mesh ; in others with a larger floral pattern, forming an S-curve with pendant. Very often the carving is deeply undercut, with even some parts pierced through. In the more complex designs, human and other figures begins to appear as adjuncts to the floral design. These appear sometimes at the base of the plant - like pattern, or are perched on the top, small in size. The most complex designs are what are known as figural struts, i. e. where the figure is so large as to fully occupy the strut. Most often the figure is of a divine *vidyadhara* or *apsara* holding a musical instrument; in some it is an armed retainer dressed in Rajasthani costume ; and in some it is a mythical beast called a *vyala* or *sardula*: partly elephant, partly lion and partly

bird. Many figural struts show winged human figures.

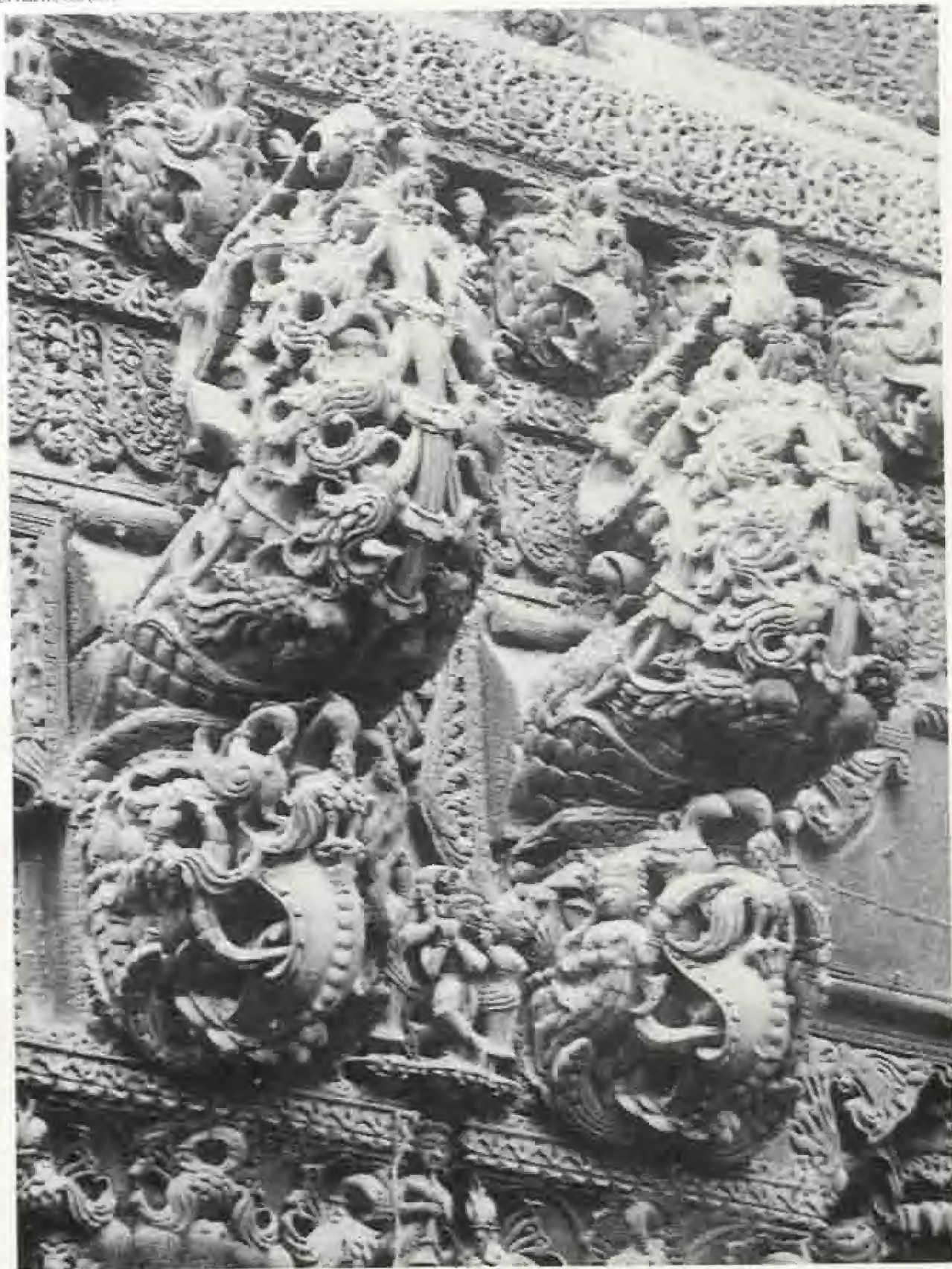
Now, the concept of the figural strut and the winged figure are very ancient, appearing in the art of Gandhara during the 1st century A. D. <sup>45</sup>, and owing much to Greek influence. The source of the design is thus known, but not the intermediate links by which it influenced Gujarati woodwork. Figural struts are found, of course, in Hindu and Jain temples but without wings. The source of the wings may have been Persian miniatures where winged angels appear, and these would form natural appendages to the divine musicians of Indian myth. In most examples in wood, the wings are folded against the body, but in some extravagant specimens they stretch out from the body in a technique quite contradictory to woodwork. The junction between wing and body is weak, and in many cases the wings have fallen off. (Figs 6, 7, 7a, 7b, 8a, 8b, 9, 9a )

### 4. Balconies and Friezes

The frieze is a band of carving between column capitals and balustrade of a running balcony. The woodwork consists of a fascia board or a light beam, above which appear joist ends of flooring behind, with each hoist end masked by a carved capping. The gaps between joist ends is filled with tiny carved figures of birds, or humans, the whole forming a continuous frieze. The joist cappings are carved into stylised elephant heads and the whole frieze thus created looks very impressive and is characteristic of North Gujarat. In Muslim houses, where such animal heads are forbidden, it is replaced with a row of droplets often arranged in tiers. These droplets are borrowed from Hindu or Jain stone architecture where they form parts of struts. The animal frieze is often accompanied by carved fascia boards or

Fig.96 A close-up of the area above the capitals. The design is ornate and over decorative (facing page).







light beams: in both cases the carving shows a repetitive floral crescent.

Balconies are of two kinds. The older, traditional balcony has a curvilinear shaped fashioned out of single block of wood, i. e. it is not bent into shape. This balustrade is supported by uprights at intervals. Curvilinear forms are extremely rare in Gujarati woodwork and the origin for this particular example is not clear. It is quite different from the curvilinear forms found in Buddhist architecture and bears no relationship to them. The fashioning of a curvature in this case is wasteful in material, yet it was produced. In older specimens the curvilinear surface was left uncarved, but in later ones portions of it were left uncut, and these raised portions were then carved into very curious combinations of plants, birds, elephants, humans, etc. As an alternative to this, and as a climax to the urge for decorating every inch of the surface, some of the curvilinear surfaces were covered with an evenly distributed floral pattern which was extremely difficult to execute because of the curving surface. The top rail to the balustrade always carried a running floral meander.

The supporting uprights of the balustrade provided an ideal form for figural work, and in most cases the carvings showed divine musicians holding musical instruments or standing upon lotus (the lotus as a pedestal is traditionally known for divinity). In the Ahmedabad area, armed retainers occur, and around Baroda one finds erotic couples and dancers.

The second kind of balustrade is straight and flat, and seems to have originated in Muslim houses of Patan. Here the carvings are also of Islamic origin : most frequently and evenly distributed floral or geometrical pattern, interspersed with cypresses and birds. This flat balustrade appears in many Hindu houses, i. e. it has no religious connotation. ( See Figs 10, 11, 12, 13a, 13b )

## 5. Wooden Fronts

The curvilinear balustrade was originally part of an open verandah, but it could be observed that with time the later houses enclosed the whole verandah with a light wooden frontage of panels within frames placed vertically. These wooden fronts were placed on top of the existing curvilinear balustrades, thus creating a very anomalous design. The upper woodwork was not a continuation of the lower (it could not be due to the curvature), nor was the lower balustrade eliminated to make way for a total panelled front. Instead, in a traditional, orthodox manner, the lower curvilinear balustrade was retained and the upper part merely added to it, disregarding the incongruity. This alone proves that the upper front had an alien origin. Such frontages (without the lower balustrade) appear very frequently in the Muslim houses of Patan, and that obviously is the source. These Patan fronts were introduced because of the seclusion of women; they were light in construction because they rested on cantilevers. Given this large area in wood, it was natural for it to be carved. The early Patan fronts display remarkably little carving, the panels merely being covered with large rosettes of a crude design; some later houses begin to have a finer pattern of flowers sparsely distributed. It is in Ahmedabad that the wooden front receives its richest carvings, and that too in Hindu and Jain houses in which the front was eagerly adopted.

These carved fronts of Ahmedabad display a kind of carving quite different from that found anywhere else in Gujarat. The whole surface, including the frames, is covered with a minutely incised floral pattern forming a close mesh. Sometimes the frames bear figural work

Fig. 97. More details of fig. 96 shows a trio of human figures squeezed in between : a central flute player, flanked by females bearing fly-whisks, just below them a trumpet player flanked by peacocks (facing page).







enmeshed among flowers. It is this unique kind of minute pattern which has such a strong resemblance to block - printing , as already mentioned.

In a few specimens there appears a very remarkable design, namely of a human figure at the bottom holding the stem of a plant which meanders in a great flourish upwards. Now, this particular motif is also ancient, being found in Gupta and Buddhist art. " The Buddhist yaksha even spouts plants from his mouth and belly, while humans and plants appear conjointly in Gupta period. (Fig. 14, 15, 16, 17a, 17b)

#### 6. Windows

The carvings on window jambs and lintels is basically the same as on doors, except that window shutters are carved very little. In the more pretentious windows there is added below a decorative sill supported by carved brackets, similar to the joist cappings mentioned above, while in between them are fillers carved as birds, etc. In two famous houses in Vaso, these fillers are carved with scenes from the Rama legend and other mythical figures.

The Muslim houses of Patan have, in their windows, wooden grills carved in a very intricate manner. They are made of carved bars placed horizontally and vertically, fitting into prepared rebates, and nailed together. Each bar consists of a series of cushion-like discs which filled the space between the joints, allowing air to pass but prevented anyone from seeing through. It is obvious that this kind of grill was required in Muslim houses to ensure the seclusion of women, but it was subsequently freely imitated in Hindu and Jain houses in the Patan area. To further embellish the grill, small rosettes were nailed onto the junctions of the bars, producing a very rich but over-decorated appearance. Such grills were located primarily around the central courtyard of the Muslim house where most socialising occurred.

In a variant design, the bars were cut into long undulating strips of wood placed diagonally across each other and nailed; the undulations produced an opening resembling an oval or ' cow's eye ' shape. It is our opinion that when Sanskrit *Shilpa* texts speak about the gavaksha window (*gavaksha* literally means cow's eye ), it is meant to be this grill, and not that the whole window is oval. ( See Figs 18, 19, 20 )

#### 7. Horse Pegs :

The 'horse peg' is a wall peg fashioned into the form of a rampant horse, but with only about half its body. These pegs are about 20 cm. high and project some 10 cm. from the wall. They are fixed to the bonding timber in the *parisal* wall separating it from the *ordo*, and appear

Fig.98. The finest flower wooden frontage is peculiar with no running balcony.







Fig. 99. Long windows reaching down to floor level, each with its own small balcony.

between doors of the *parsal*. No one could adequately explain the reason for the form of the horse. The usual answer given was that the pegs were meant for hanging up things. But this is quite unconvincing because the shape of the head, with projections, is quite unsuitable for such a rough usage. Beside, if they were meant as real pegs, then they should have been distributed all over the house: but this was not so. The horse-peg appears only in this particular location. Again, the typical Indian beast of burden is the bull or elephant, and either should have appeared logically as pegs. The horse is not a common creature in Indian myth or art, and its isolated appearance rare. The conclusion is, that it must have a ritual purpose, and this is supported by some other phenomena.

In some houses, we found the horse nailed onto corners of a window-obviously an afterthought. Fischer and Shah found horse-heads used extensively in Saurashtra, appearing even on *tollas*, but could furnish no

explanation<sup>45</sup>. There are some verses in the *Pramanamajari* on this topic:

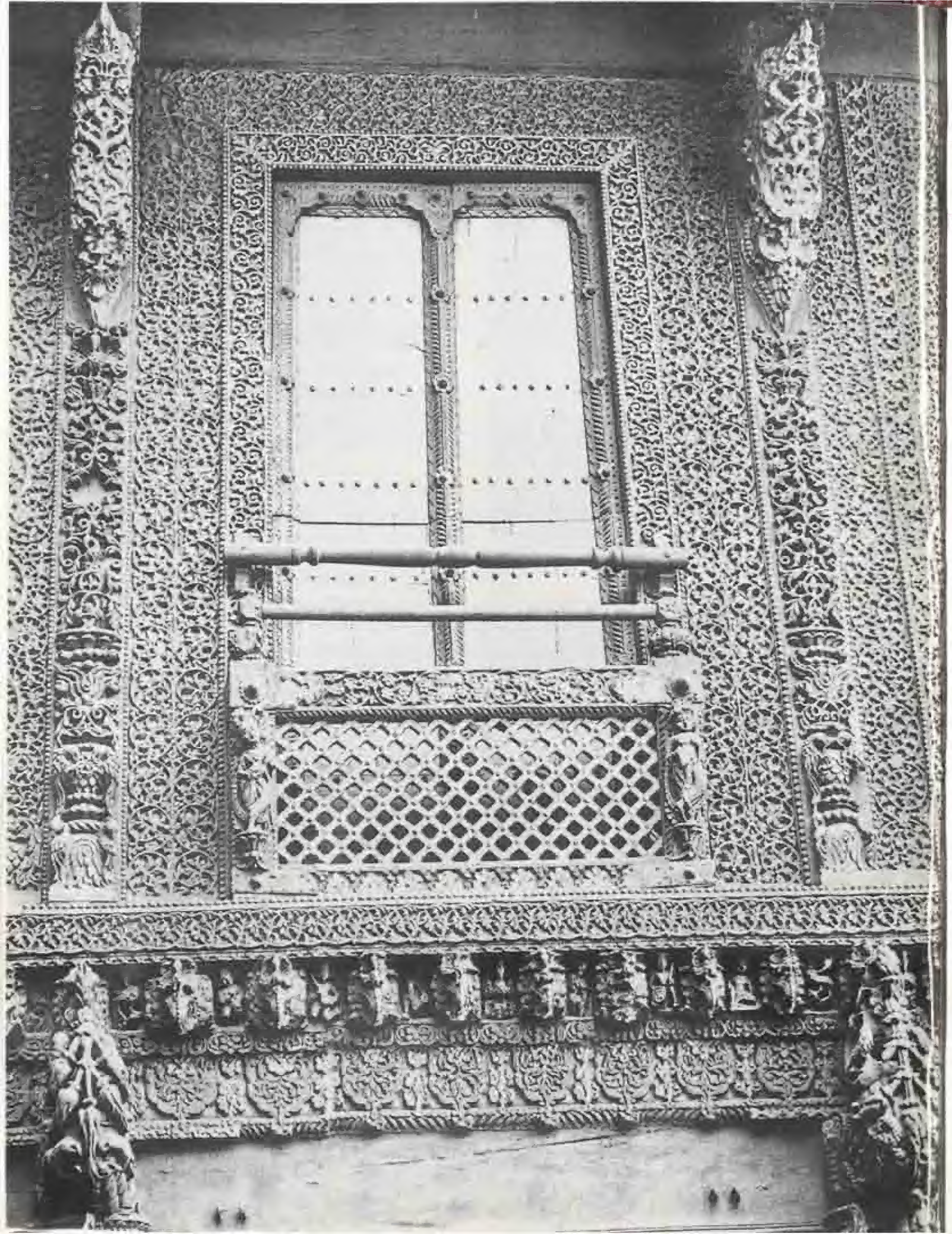
"In all dwellings horse-pegs (*turaga*) should be fixed to the left and to the right, in door-walls (those walls which have doors) and rear-walls."

"They are auspicious if facing the house - entrance, and not the other way. They should be tranquil, placid; their forelegs bent (to denote prancing) ."

"But in the house of a Yavana (Muslim or foreigner) there should be a *gajadanta* (round peg) to the left and right and no harm accrues." <sup>46</sup>

The above prescription, though late, clearly indicates that the horse-peg is somehow 'auspicious'. Now, the horse is of great ritual significance among tribals and in South India. In *The Village Gods of South India* by H. Whitehead, he writes.<sup>47</sup> He (Iyenar) generally has a shrine to himself, and is regarded as the night - watchman of the village. The compound of his shrine is generally crowded with clay figures of horses, great and small, on which he is supposed to ride round . . . to keep off evil spirits." <sup>47</sup> Koppers and Jungblut, in their exhaustive study of the Bhils (who live in Gujarat), unfortunately do not give details about the horse - figures, but it is well known that clay horses are offered to the village shrines (*malvan*) every year. Further, as we have personally seen, Bhils paint scenes which prominently include the horse (sometimes rampant and ichthyphallic) on precisely the same location in the *parsal* wall as in the Gujarati house. This close resemblance cannot be fortuitous. The custom is obviously originally tribal, and has been borrowed from them. If the horse were a demon - scarer, then its logical location would have been on the elevation - but this is not so. Its location in the *parsal* can be understood only if it were a fertility symbol, because it was in the *parsal* that parturition took place.







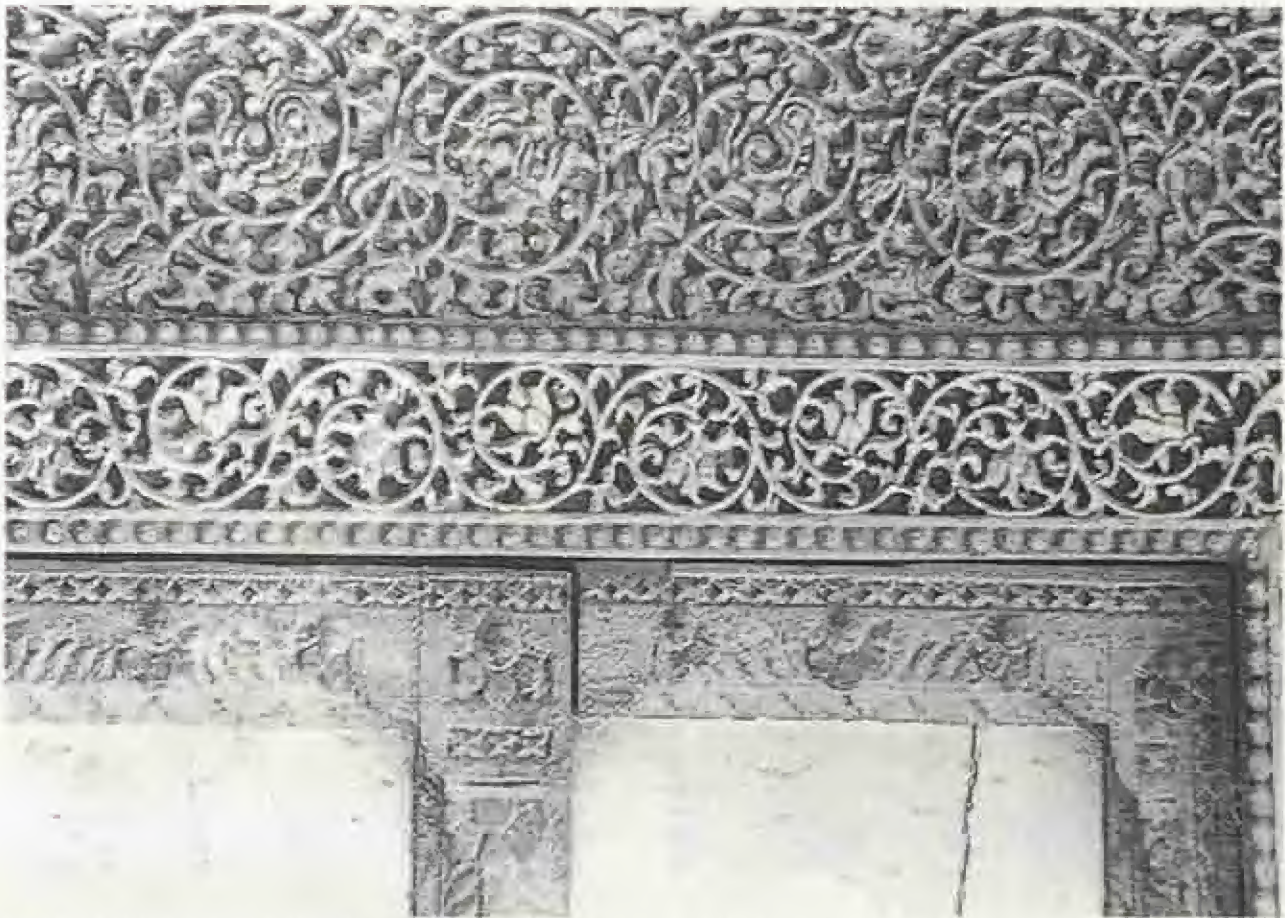


Fig.101. A lintel of the window (fig. 99.) and window frames are etched out sharply.

## 8. Carved Ceilings

The carved ceiling was one of the most magnificent decorative items in the repertoire of wood carving. It was generally located in the *divankhanu*, the reception room above the *khadki*, room meant for rich clients and associates. The *divankhanu*, where it existed, was the most richly decorated space in the house. In addition to the carved ceiling, it had painted walls, decorative wall niches, stucco mouldings, tinted glass panes, and chandeliers.

The carved ceiling was so made that the

room was spanned above with a row of joists to which were nailed close-fitting planks placed diagonally; each plank was given an undulating outline which fitted into the undulations of its neighbour. The undulation joints thus formed were covered with small fret-like pieces of wood, additional pieces being added to complete the geometrical pattern. These fretted pieces were given a lighter colour than the background of planks, thus producing a sharp contrasting design. The outer boundary of the ceiling had a broad border carved with a floral scroll, and the whole ceiling strongly resembled carpet design. The use of carpets in interiors is of Islamic origin and this was clearly its source. Similar ceilings carved in stone appear in Mughal architecture, but the earliest in wood

Fig.100. A close-up of balcony of fig. 99. It shows figural upright and pierced grill as balustrade. Small fretted strips of wood are morticed and nailed to each other diagonally. (facing page)





Fig.102. The column of wooden frontage shows superimposed details. Birds and floral patterns dominate.

is in Bijapur dating from the 16th century A.D.<sup>48</sup>, and the similarity in design to those in Gujarat proves that Bijapur was the prototype.

The construction of such ceilings using wooden pieces nailed from below was extremely poor carpentry, and many of the pieces had indeed fallen down. This proves that the whole technique was not indigenous, but more than that, that wood was seeking to imitate something else, namely textiles.

It should be emphasised that the above flat ceiling was different in conception as compared to carved ceilings in Hindu and Jain temples : in the latter the designs are more deeply undercut presenting a far more three-dimensional appearance, whereas the flatness

of the Gujarati and Bijapuri wooden ceilings are quite different in character. The difference was not due to the use of differing materials, the former in stone, the latter in wood, but due to a difference in conception. ( Figs. 21, 22, 23 )

#### 9. Carved Niches

In very few houses we found a unique feature : a wall niche located in the *parsal* wall facing the entrance, about one meter square, lined with carved wood. The centre piece was circular with figural carvings, the surrounding area covered with minutely carved floral patterns. These niches served no useful purpose and were merely decorative. They appear only in the district of Nadiad and we were unable to trace the source of the design. ( Fig. 24 )

Other carved niches appeared in Muslim

Fig.103. A view of different figural upright with one male and one female figure, each on a lotus pedestal.





Fig. 104. Close-up of female figure of fig. 103 holding a drum. The female wears blouse and thin clinging skirt, with head slightly tilted to one side and legs crossed.



houses but they were different in design. Muslim interiors are normally full of masonry wall niches with cusped arches, and these are used for keeping articles. In these Gujarati versions, the wall niche was square, but it had a carved front with a built-in arch and pierced trefoils. A running shelf was overhead. Both, the shelf and the niche were used for keeping articles. (Fig. 25)

#### 10. Carved Domical Vaults

In many Jain temples it was a custom to build the main structure of masonry and then to finish the interior in carved wood. In this case, the woodwork had no structural function, carried no loads, but merely formed a lining to the masonry (except for the columns which were structural). Since the front part of the temple, the *mandapa*, was domical, the wooden lining also had a domical shape, and in order to produce it pieces of curved timber were placed in rings, each ring corbelling inwards beyond the ring below it till the central part could be covered with a single pendant. Now, this is exactly the manner in which a stone domical vault is constructed, i. e. here wood imitates stone. The imitation is carried even into the motifs and forms of the carvings, and since these are well known as compared to the stone originals, there is no need to describe them.

However, there were some novel features. Just below the level of the dome there were, on all the four sides, cantilevered balconies with canopies built up of dwarf columns, cusped struts and a roof - all richly carved with scenes partly religious and partly domestic. ( Fig. 26 )

It is not immediately apparent why these interiors should have been in wood. Normal Jain temples are throughout in stone. It is doubtful if teakwood was cheaper than stone. The possible reason is different. In very early times, as I have shown elsewhere <sup>49</sup>, all Hindu and Jain temples were wholly in wood - at least in Gujarat - so that a wooden interior was the







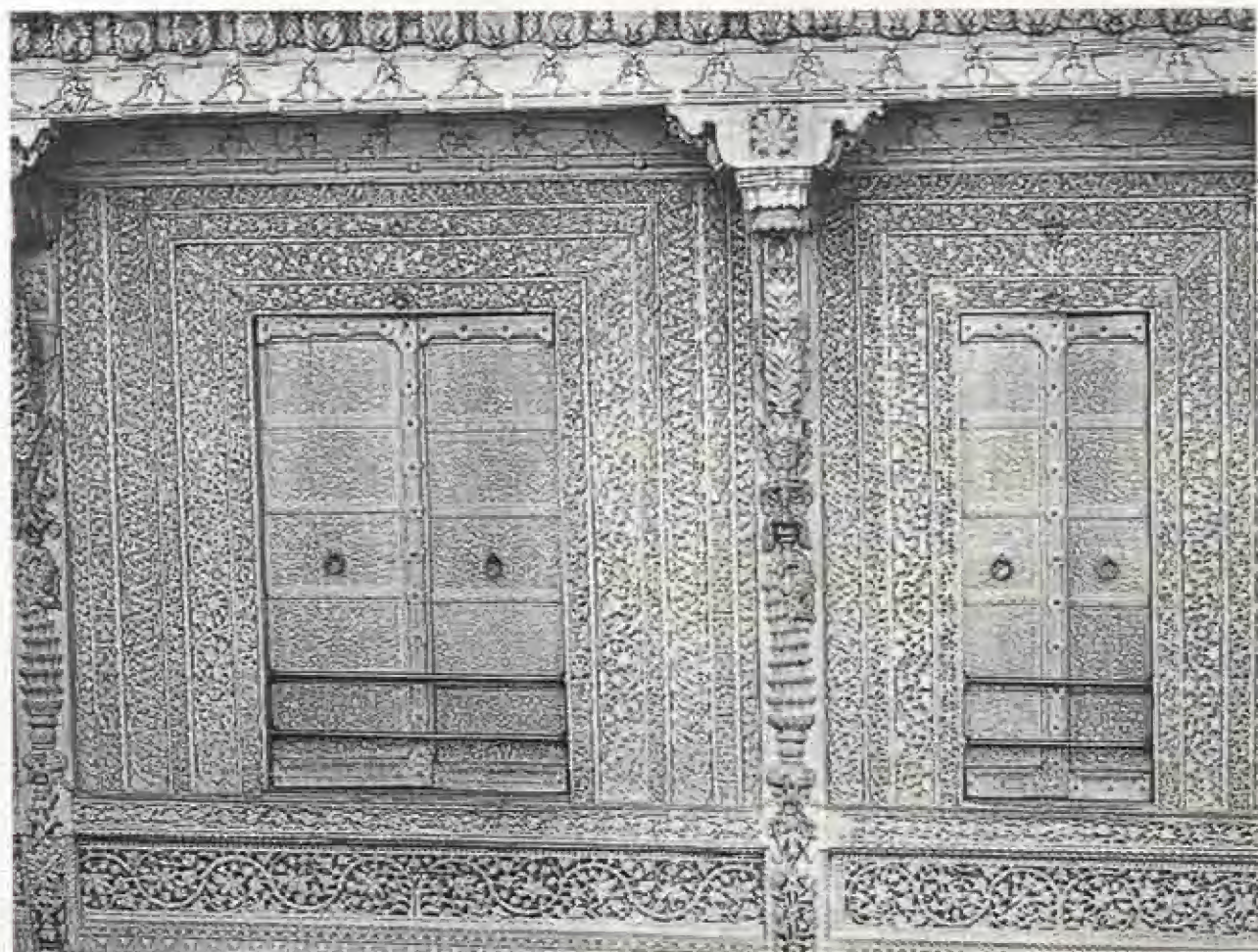


Fig.106. A view of combination of balcony plus panelled front with flat balustrade. The floral pattern commences from the thick central stem and undulates in both directions.

customary feature. About the 13th or 14th Century A. D. it became the custom to replace wooden temples with masonry, and generally all were in stone or marble. These wooden interiors could, then be memories of the period when everything was in wood, i. e. they were not innovations but throwbacks to an older tradition.

#### 11. Wooden *Jharokhas*

The *jharokha* is a cantilevered balcony common to many domestic houses, but the term has a special significance in palace architecture. Here the *jharokha* is a ceremonial balcony from

which the ruler appears before his citizens on special occasions (among Mughal rulers it was the custom for the king to appear daily before his subjects.) the *jharokha* is characteristic of Rajasthan and this royal feature is borrowed in Gujarat from that region, but with a change in material. The wooden *jharokha* is rare in Gujarat, being found mainly in areas those of the Muslim Nawabs of North Gujarat, and all have now disappeared from their original locations. Our photographs are the only record of the original structures. ( Figs. 27, 28a )

#### The Function of Carvings

Carvings are obviously one aspect of decoration and as such it might seem

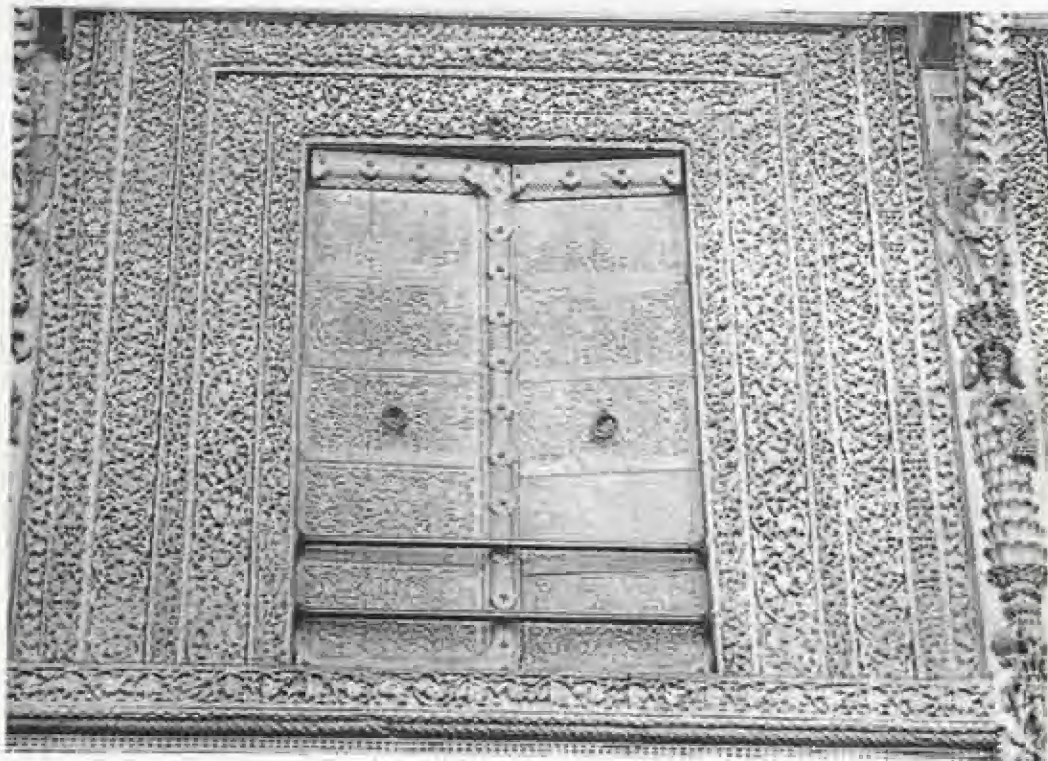
Fig.105. A street view of the houses. Originally they were two-storeyed; the third floor is a later addition. (facing page)





Fig.107. Details of the finer carving can be seen on the frontage. The balustrade has a creeper emerging from centre. The uprights carry different floret patterns.

Fig.108. A full view of one of the windows on the frontage. The shutters are carved with spreading plants. The inner frame has rosettes, each with a single nail at its centre. Iron straps hold shutters





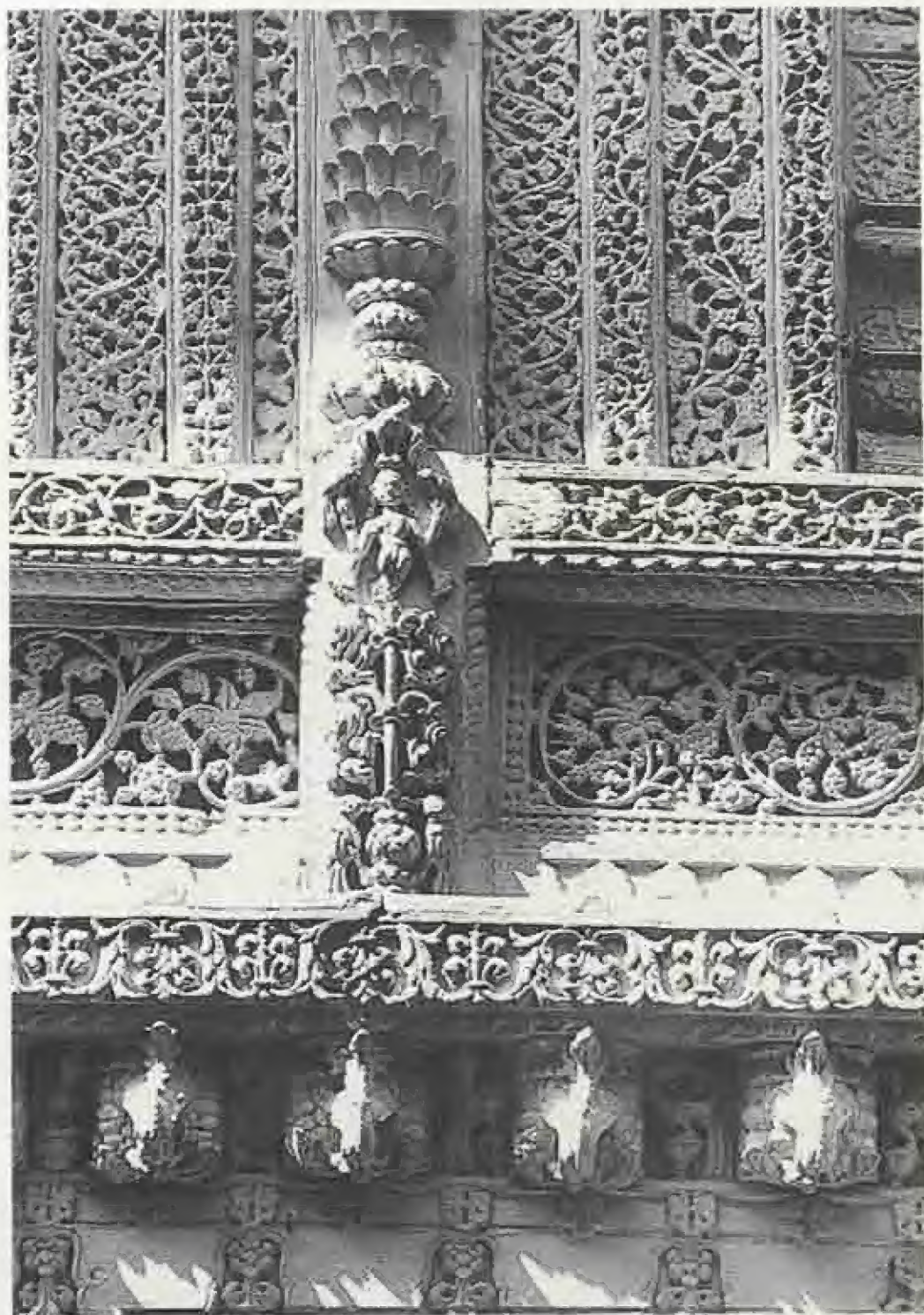


Fig. 109. A close-up of wooden panelling: The frame around window shows three bands, all richly carved. It also shows small figures placed between the elephant heads of the frieze.





Fig.110. The rosettes of the panelled frontage are finely executed producing a rich contrast of light and shade, and the contrast between a broader band of carving and a narrower strip.

superfluous to analyse their function. But there is more to this. We have already discussed that one aspect of carving was social, namely to display wealth and status. We have also shown that the distribution of carvings within interiors was always in spaces which were used for social events, and not those used purely for personal, intimate and family functions. It was seen that besides these social reasons, there were also some ritual reasons for carvings, such as in the case of the horse-shaped wall pegs.

It is our proposition that all carving was originally either ritual or magical, the two terms being actually part of the same phenomenon.

The purpose of rituals or of magical acts

is two-fold : one is to ward off evil influences; the other is to promote beneficial influences. It is not necessary that the two kinds of influence should emanate from different sources : the same source can do both good and evil, depending upon its mood. In popular belief, a spirit is not essentially either wholly good or wholly evil : if suitably placated, a hitherto evil spirit can become beneficial, and vice versa. Since the mood of a spirit is never known in advance, it is advisable to cater to both moods, i. e. to set up rituals which placate or render it 'auspicious', and to simultaneously ward off possible dangers. In this connection, the following evidence from folklore may be considered.



J. M. Campbell examined the subject in *Notes on the Spirit Basis of Belief and Custom in the Indian Antiquary* of 1895. While some of his reasoning can be questioned, his facts cannot. He gives an illuminating example of the use of magical circles to control spirits, and writes, "As spirits fear circles and cannot cross them, devils can be kept in rings."<sup>50</sup> After citing some minor uses of circles for this purpose, he adds, "Arches are half circles, and, like full circles, scare fiends. So the Konkani Kumbis of Poona make an arch of mango leaves over the door of the wedding porch . . . So in times of cholera a *torana* or arch is set up outside a Gujarat village to stay the entrance of Mother Cholera." And, ". . . the cholera or small-pox-stopping *torans* of Gujarat villages, and the Bengal Malers posts and cross-beams, seem to be the rude originals

of the richly carved gateways of Sanchi and other topes, which, like them, are crowned with charms, the Buddhist emblems of luck or evil-scaring."<sup>51</sup> Campbell certainly seems to have hit upon the purpose of the curious gateways of Sanchi, their symbolic motifs, and, what he has not noticed, namely their form. Each of these gateways, although generally straight, has a lintel with a slight hump or curve in the centre which makes no sense unless its relation to a half circle is seen in this light. The half circle is protective.

The use of a *torana* or decorative arch of leaves placed at entrances is a custom which is practiced even today, for example at marriages, new year ceremonies, for the reception of honoured visitors, etc. The question which arises is : why the use of foliage in the *torana*?

Fig.111. A part of balustrade, coming without admixture of birds. The corner carving has plant motif.

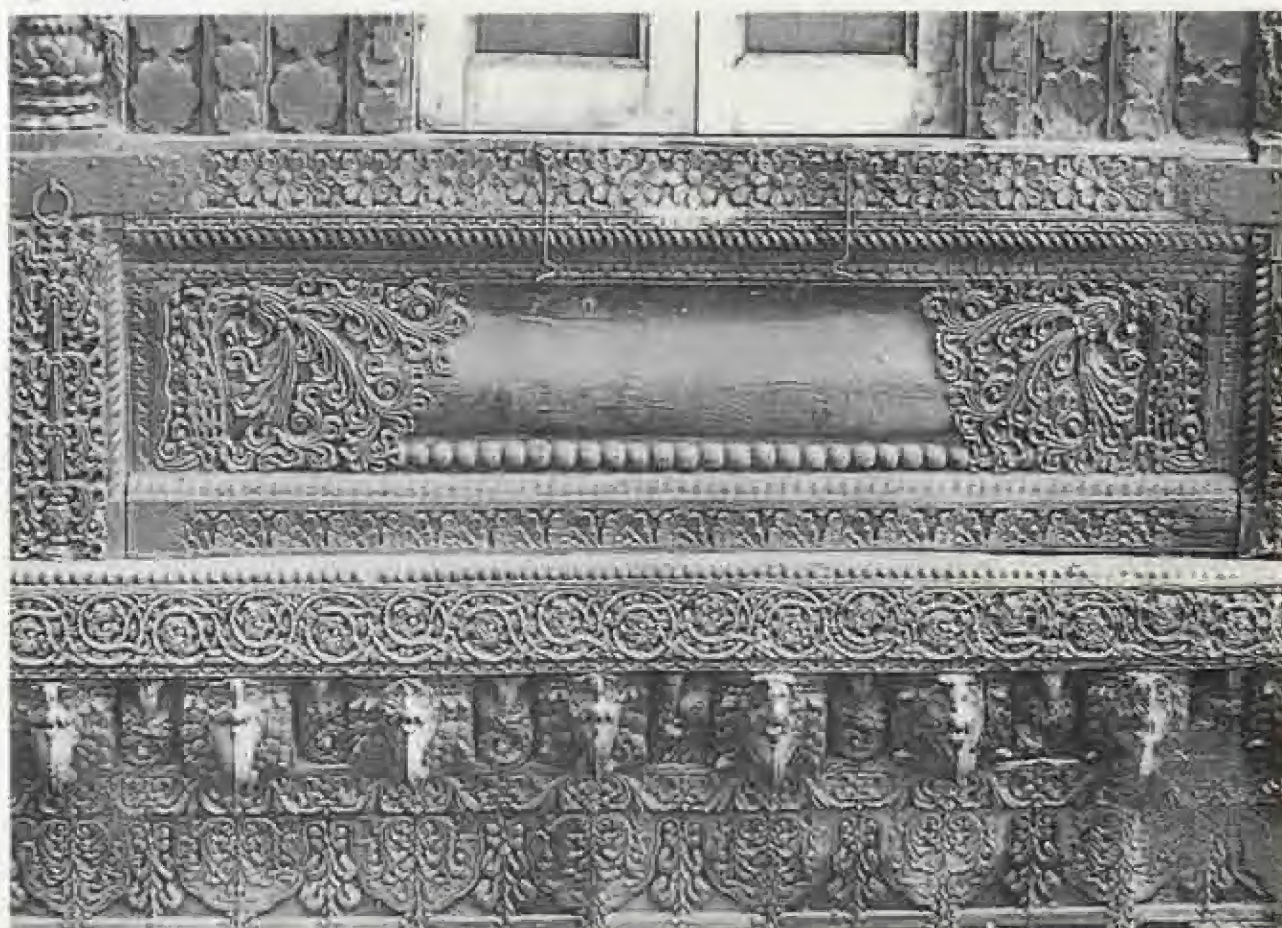






Fig.112. A part of balustrade showing stalks emerge from one stylised bud, come together at a second from which emerge a spray of foliage.

Campbell does not go into this question. Now, in ancient folklore, there are spirits called *yakshas* which are always associated with trees and plants. A *yaksha* was temperamental spirit who could produce both good and evil, depending upon his mood. In Buddhist art he is portrayed both anthropomorphically as also associated with foliage. Foliage is thus his symbol and the symbol of his habitat, and that is why foliage is depicted in the torana. The symbol of foliage serves to placate and, in common parlance, may be called 'auspicious'.

A support for this interpretation comes from the art historian Heinrich Zimmer in his monumental *The Art of Indian Asia*, "The profuse decoration, moreover, was at least as much an expression of over-flowing joy in

earthly life as of an anxiety to ward off demonic forces through an evocation of auspicious divine manifestations." <sup>32</sup>

It will now be clear that carvings, including wood carvings, had a purpose which went beyond the purely aesthetic: carving was a protective and / or auspicious device, and the choice of motifs and their location was governed by this consideration. Apart from the motif of foliage, we have the Ganesha or alternatively the vase (*purnaghata* or *kalasha*) on door lintels, the *vidyadhivas* and *apsaras* on balustrades, the erotic couples, the mythical beasts on struts, etc. all these motifs appear not only in the domestic house but equally in the temple and serve the same function, and their meanings belong to the well known realm of Indian mythology.





Fig. 113. Another balustrade with foliage terminates in fruit-like appendages. The carved face of the light beam produce harmonious blending of design.





Fig. 114. The carving of an ascetic with knotted hair, grinding *blang*, in a pestle.



The only exception so far as Gujarat is concerned is the horse peg, which has already been explained above.

As regards the erotic couple found in Gujarati wood carving, some further remarks are required. The subject of erotic Indian art has been thoroughly discussed by Devangana Desai in her *Erotic Sculpture of India*. She finds that erotic art has no single motive, but complex motives which include warding off evil, promoting fertility, general auspiciousness, etc. But a discovery made by us in this connection may throw a fresh light on the subject. We found in a very prestigious residence in Ahmedabad of the 18th century A. D., belonging to the banker Lallu Bahadur Parekh, an erotic mural on a rear wall showing a scene of copulation. The mural was located high up above street level and was thus quite obviously not meant to be seen by any visitors or passers-by. For whom was it then intended and why a scene of such blatant sexuality? Had it been a protective device, then a front elevation would have been a better location. It seems to us that its purpose was to invoke some fertility spirit which was thought to flit around the house and high above the ground. In other words, its purpose was secretive and magical, and all similar scenes found in temples must originally have had a similar purpose. This erotic mural

was the only one seen by us in a Gujarati house; others found in Maratha houses belong to quite a different order.

### Maratha Houses

Some remarks are required regarding Maratha houses, i. e. of a community which for some time ruled over large areas of Gujarat, and one branch of whom permanently settled down in Baroda. Baroda has a large number of old Maratha houses (called *vadas*) as also some wooden palaces, but they are conspicuous by their lack of carvings. This was not due to lack of funds, because even the palace of the Gaekwads has the same characteristic but because of two other reasons. One is sociological wherein the Maratha culture has always been noted for its simplicity. Europeans who were closely associated with Maratha rule have specifically remarked upon this<sup>53</sup>, and their *vadas*, although massive in size, lack all those decorative features so typical of Gujarati houses.

The second reason is that the Marathas, coming from the Deccan, adopted an architectural style modelled upon that of the Muslim aristocracy of that region. This was itself based more on masonry and stucco work than on wood carving-except for some carved ceilings and carved *kamans*, which were copied by the Marathas.



## IV

# DESCRIPTION OF WOOD CARVINGS

The description of the wood carvings of Gujarat can be done in two ways; one, by dividing the subject thematically; two, by dividing it according to the towns where carvings occur. We have preferred the second method because it was felt that each town has its own peculiar characteristics which would have been lost in a thematic approach. Before giving the town-wise description, it is necessary to briefly speak about urban characteristics in general.

Towns in Gujarat today have an inner core which is a survival of the original town of medieval times. This core is often walled in, and even where the walls have disappeared one can still discern the boundaries. It is within this older part that most woodwork is found, and the best houses are still located in the central portion of the core. Even though much new housing has displaced the older ones, enough remains to be able to identify the general character and its structure.

So far as woodwork and wood carvings are concerned, we are mainly restricted to North Gujarat, for that is the region having the bulk of the carvings, and it is the North Gujarat town which has to be described. The settlement pattern of such a town consists of groups of families which have settled together into small colonies of houses arranged in a defensive

pattern with a single gateway to guard it. This defensive *cul-de-sac* is called a *khadki*; a number of *khadkis* opening out onto a larger road which was in turn guarded by twin gates at each end and was called a *pol*. *Khadkis* and *pols* were inhabited by members of upper castes whose social customs were sufficiently similar for them to be able to co-exist together. The close social intimacy which *khadki* and *pol* produced resulted in a great uniformity of life-style, custom, habit, and outlook and this social uniformity was reflected in the uniformity of the architecture and carvings. It is a very curious phenomenon to find disparate castes, for examples Vaniyas (Baniyas), Brahmins, Patels, all sharing a similar life-style by common consent.

Fieldwork showed that these inner city cores were mainly occupied by Hindu and Jain communities even though Gujarat had been ruled by Muslims for centuries. That the latter did not occupy the prized central locations has complex reasons. Briefly these are as follows. Even though towns might be under Muslim administration, trade and manufacture

Fig.115. The largest structure in wood in Gujarat - The Swaminarayan temple, built in 1850 A.D (facing page)

Fig.116. A row of columns and carved struts of the Swaminarayan temple (page 106).







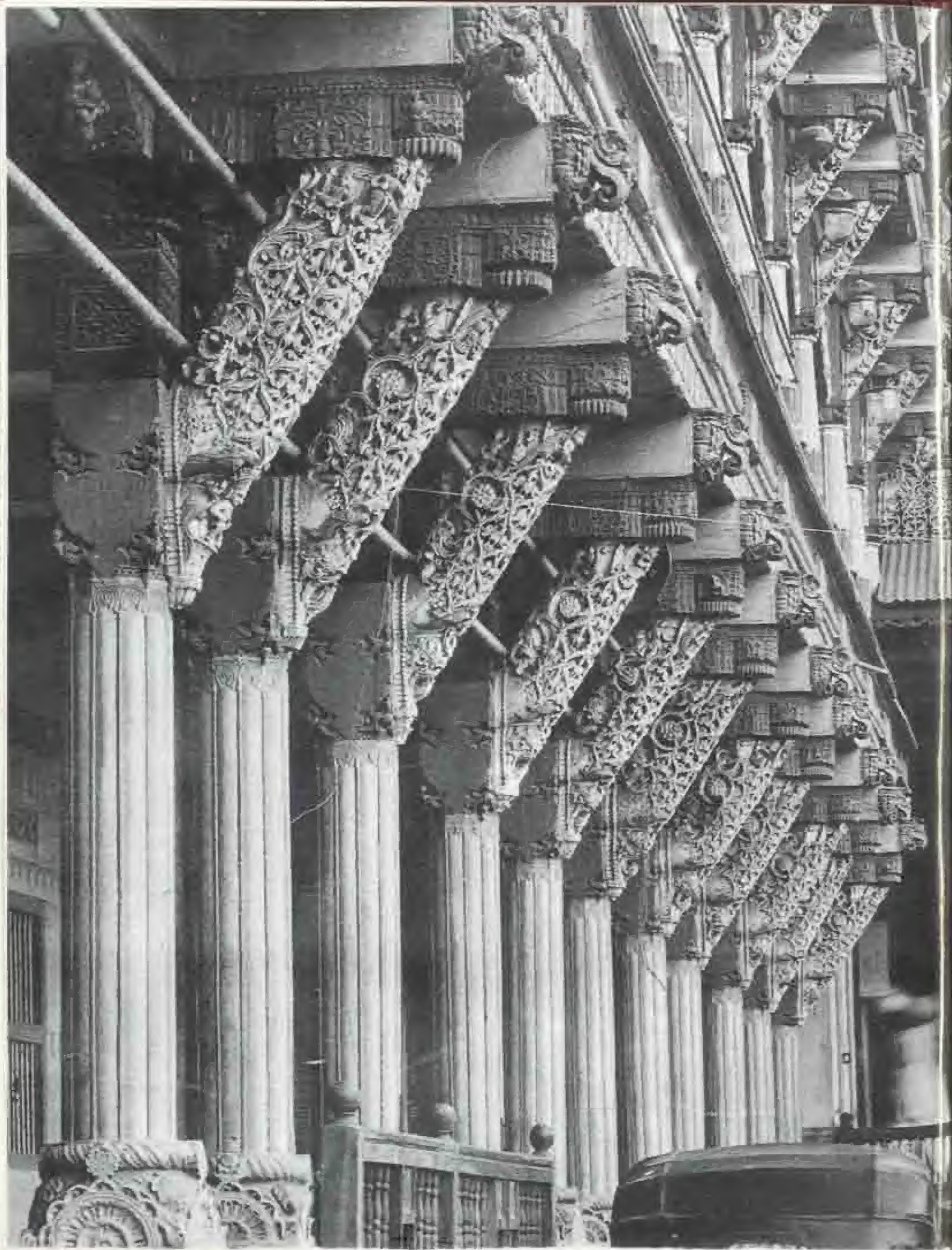






Fig.117. A strut with  
slightly carved  
female with a child.





Fig.118. A strut with  
slightly carved  
female with *tamboor*  
in hand.





Fig.119. A  
strut  
showing a  
female  
with  
trumpet.  
The  
posture is  
stiff and  
archaic  
with  
round  
face





Fig.120.  
The strut  
shows  
mythical  
composite  
beast  
variety.  
The  
females  
are seen at  
the base.





Fig.121. A view of elevation. Arched openings to the doors behind the balconies are seen. The shutters are panelled.

continued to be mainly in Hindu and Jain hands. Urban prosperity depended upon trade and manufacture and it was the Hindus and Jains who had built up expertise in these occupations; to dispossess them would have meant loss of revenue. Thus, far from being displaced by Muslims, Hindus and Jains were freely permitted to occupy these prime sites in urban cores. Thus, it was that demographically the core remained Hindu and Jain and it is in their houses that the richest wood carvings appear.

Where Muslims had similar occupations, as for example in Patan or Siddhapur, their groups formed the central core and possessed the richer houses. But generally Muslims preferred to become administrators and soldiers, and they were distributed, not in urban centres,

but in rural areas where they were allotted lands to maintain them. Or they were settled in the suburbs, called *puras*, but their existence was always precarious. Any change of rulers might result in their ouster from power, for power in their case was not hereditary but temporary, depending upon the mood of the ruler. It is due to this precariousness that Muslim houses of the aristocracy have largely disappeared, while those of Hindus and Jains have survived for over 150 years.

The relationship between commerce and urban architecture explains the relative paucity of old houses in Saurashtra, and their complete absence in South Gujarat.

In describing the towns of Gujarat, the system followed is to start from the extreme north, move southward, and then finish with Saurashtra. For each town there is first a brief general description, then the illustrations follow, and in these what is first shown is that which seemed to be of greatest significance, either due to historical reasons, or stylistic reasons; residences are shown before *haveli*-temples.

### Palanpur

Palanpur was once a fortified town ruled by Muslim nawabs. It was never of any great economic or political importance, and consequently does not have much woodwork. However, the general style of wood carving seems to have been influenced by the old palace of the nawabs, called *Rajgadhi*. This palace was sold off many years ago, after parts of it had collapsed, so that what we saw were fragments of what must have been a very fine work of architecture. A peculiarity of its woodwork is that most of the carvings are on the elevations; the interiors are very plain. In keeping with Islamic tradition, figural motifs are rare and are replaced instead by a wealth of floral and geometrical patterns. The most lavish display of wood carving is on balconies, of which Palanpur has many fine examples,



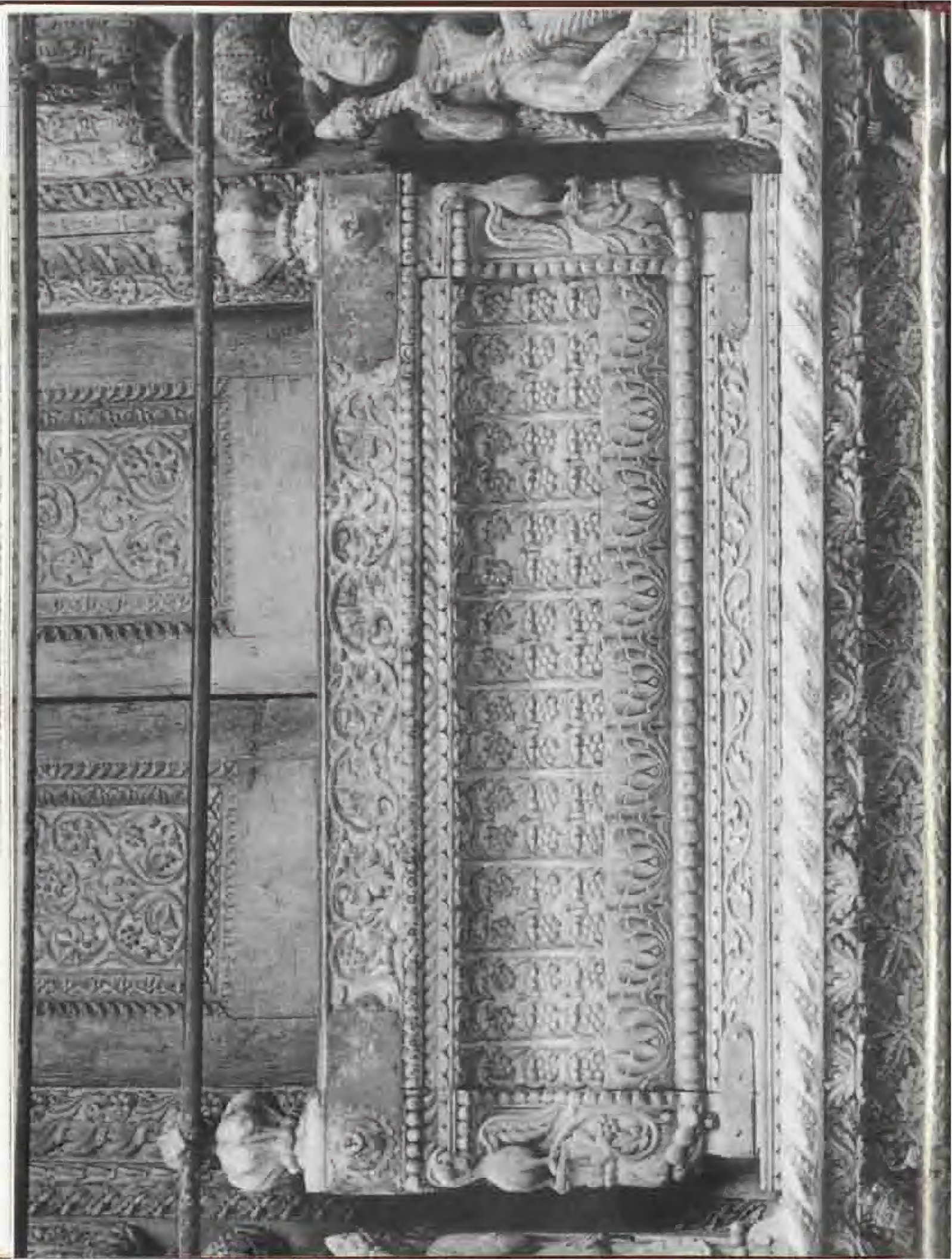






Fig.123. The frieze below the balconies show remarkable carvings. The horizontal band shows elephant heads. A series of small figures of great elegance and variety are seen in between.

Fig.124. The fascia board above the row of elephant heads is curvilinear. A group of animal figures resembling Balinese dance is carved on it (right bottom).



Fig.122. A view of balcony with large figures on the base of the tapering columns. The end figures are females in a classical *tribhanga* pose with tilted head, crossed legs and holding flying whisks (facing page)



Fig.125. Another part of fascia showing four-armed deity grappling with two apparent demons holding swords. The deity is holding them by their top-knots.

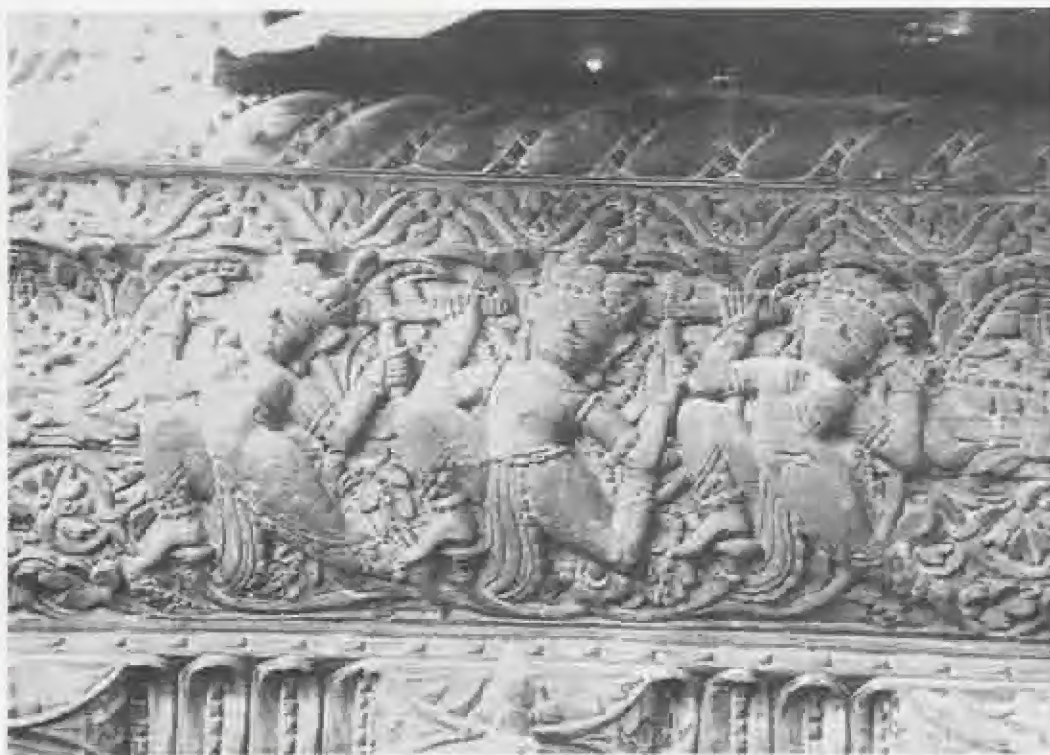
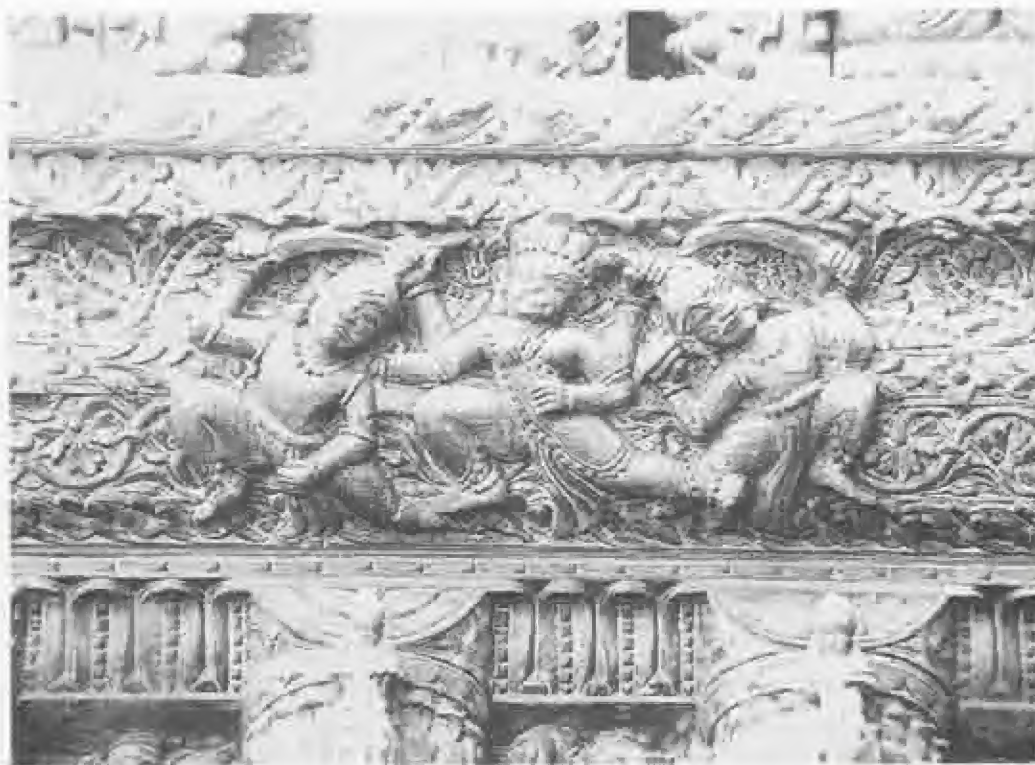


Fig.126. Vishnu flanked by two females. All of them are holding sticks in their hands. This depicts famous Gujarati *Dandiya-ras*.





Fig. 127. Facia board with a group of figures. This group stands out against ornate background carvings.

besides those in the palace. These balconies are cantilevered on struts and a peculiarity found only in Palanpur is that the space between struts is filled in with flat, carved wooden panels set at an inclination to catch the eye. These panels serve no structural purpose and are merely for display.

The balconies of the palace have one feature derived from Muslim social life, namely pierced screens above balcony balustrades. These screens were meant for women to look through without being seen. They present a very airy, delicate appearance on elevations, but were never copied in Hindu or Jain domestic houses. Similar pierced woodwork, however, appears in balustrades in the palaces, as also in examples in Ahmedabad.

A very special kind of balcony, called the *jharokha*, Fig. 28 has already been explained in chapter III. It is a ceremonial balcony for the use of royalty, usually constructed in stone, but here we find it executed in wood - something

extremely rare. Unfortunately this particular *jharokha* has been sold and removed from its original site; our photographs are the only record of the original condition.

The Palanpur *jharokha* is designed (as those of Gwalior and Rajasthan) as a cantilever starting from a single supporting element at the bottom and rising upwards in expanding tiers, each tier made up of a ring of struts and joists with carved panels between struts. The upper part has typical tapering columns (a feature copied from Rajasthani and Mughal architecture) which enclose pierced wooden screens. Although figural motifs are forbidden in Islam, we find here a stylised elephant head as the supporting element of the design. This is a concession to the symbolic needs of royalty. Another elephant is at the upper central panel. Noteworthy motifs are the following : the floral designs on the panels between struts - this kind of floral pattern is not typical of Gujarat and seems to be of west Asian origin; the row of droplets and small pendants forming a fringe



above struts - this particular design is found all over Palanpur as also in Muslim - dominated areas elsewhere; the row of stylised leaves forming a fringe at the uppermost edge of the carved work. The larger pendants hanging between struts seem to be copied from stone architecture and are not found elsewhere in wood.

A variant *jharokha* from the same palace overlooks the entrance doorway: the elements of design are identical with the one above. These elements may be said to form the repertoire of carvings of a 'Muslim' residence which wanted to avoid 'Hindu' carvings. ( Fig. 28b )

One decorative feature seen above needs to be emphasised. This is the row of tiny pendants,

about two centimetres in length, which forms a fringe at each tier. These pendants are suspended by tiny metal hooks in such a way that they sway with every breeze. Now, this is a very novel feature and it is specially mentioned because it re-appears in the woodwork of the Himalayan region, particularly in Kumaon, but is of Gujarati origin. The feature is not Islamic but typical of Gujarat as a whole.

The manner in which the *Rajgadhi* balcony is imitated in a Hindu house can be seen in the Nagarseth's residence (Nagarseth means town mayor). The same elements and motifs are repeated except that peacocks appear at the base of struts and corners of bracket - capitals, and the beam face also shows a row of incised semi-

Fig. 128. Different views of an elevation.







Fig. 129. The close-up of the figural struts. They are placed on the column. They have stylised wings emerging from the shoulders. Their costume is archaic.

circles. The latter feature is not common in Gujarat and appears mostly in the Ahmedabad region.

Among more richly carved houses is that of Mahendra Gafurbhai, which is of a late date as proved by the spiral shape given to the column. Such a design is quite foreign to Gujarat. The strut is richly carved in the form of a mythical beast, partly elephant, partly lion and partly bird. A strut of this kind requires a flat surface as abutment – that is why the upper part of a typical Gujarati column has straight faces – but here this sound carpentry tradition has been abandoned in favour of an eclectic alternative in which not only is the column

rounded but the abutment disturbs the spiral design.

### Radhanpur

Radhanpur is another small, fortified town once governed by Muslim nawabs; it too has a royal palace or Rajagadhi, besides a few richer houses of merchants. The palace once had a ceremonial *jharokha* in wood – as magnificent as that of Palanpur – but it was sold to an antique dealer. Fortunately it was later purchased by the Crafts museum, Delhi, and it is being set up on the basis of old photographs taken by the author at site. The supporting point of the *jharokha* is again an elephant's head with a raised trunk, but what is exceptional is the manner in which a cluster of struts spreads out from the central support. It will be recalled that a similar cluster of struts in stone appear surrounding a central pillar in the building called the Jewel House at Fatehpur Sikri. This creative and playful use of struts in architecture is definitely a Gujarati innovation and the source of the Mughal design is clearly Gujarat. The other elements of the *jharokha* are similar to Palanpur and are not described.

Among the richer merchant houses is that of the Bhansali family which has many interesting features. It will be noticed that the horizontal timbers below the balcony are arranged in tiers, each tier projecting slightly beyond the one below, so that the upper floor cantilevers beyond the ground floor. Something similar appears in the *jharokhas* mentioned above, but not so prominently. There is no structural reason for such projecting tiers, and its purpose seems to be decorative, i. e. each projection rests upon small, carved droplets (one may also call them consoles or brackets but droplets describe their decorative function better) and it is these which produce the richness. This kind of arrangement arose under Muslim influence, as an alternative to the otherwise typical elephant heads, but appears





Fig.130. Details of a strut. A female on a lotus pedestal with beading border. She is holding a small drum (top left).

Fig.131. A male and female pair in an amorous embrace (top right).

Fig.132. Carved plaque with a divine couple. A four-armed deity is seen with a female seated on one thigh. The male figure has a top-knot. He holds a trident and drum in his hands (bottom left).





Fig.133. This plaque shows a complete eclectic composition : a stylised peacock beneath a recessed roof, a curvilinear arrangement and a branching plant with birds.

here in a Hindu house. The concession to figural work is only in the presence of peacocks - again similar to Palanpur.

The balustrade of the balcony has the characteristic curvilinear form typical for Gujarat, with a slight outward inclination. This was such that people sitting inside at the floor level could recline against it. What is novel here is that the whole surface of the curvilinear balustrade is covered with a finely incised carving showing a very non-Gujarati floral pattern. Its origin is possibly West Asian. The carving of a curving surface in this manner, i.e. as if it were flat, is not a very good design, but it reappears in many parts of North Gujarat at the same period, to produce an even greater decorative effect. In an area less under Muslim influence, the balustrade uprights would have carried human figures.



Fig.134. This plaque represents multi-armed goddess holding weapons.

### Patan

Patan, once called Anahillapur, was the medieval capital of Gujarat. Much despoiled during repeated invasions, with a constantly shifting population, it suffered permanent decline when the new capital was established at Ahmedabad in 1411 A. D. The instability of the population can be seen from the architecture : most of the houses are relatively small and insignificant, especially those of the Hindus and Jains. Numerous *khadkis* (here called *pado* or *vada*) were obviously late foundations, such as Doshivad or Nagaryad, probably during Maratha rule. Substantial number of houses seen by us belonged to Muslim merchants, who are described further on.

There exists a large palace of the Gaekwads, in whose territory Patan once



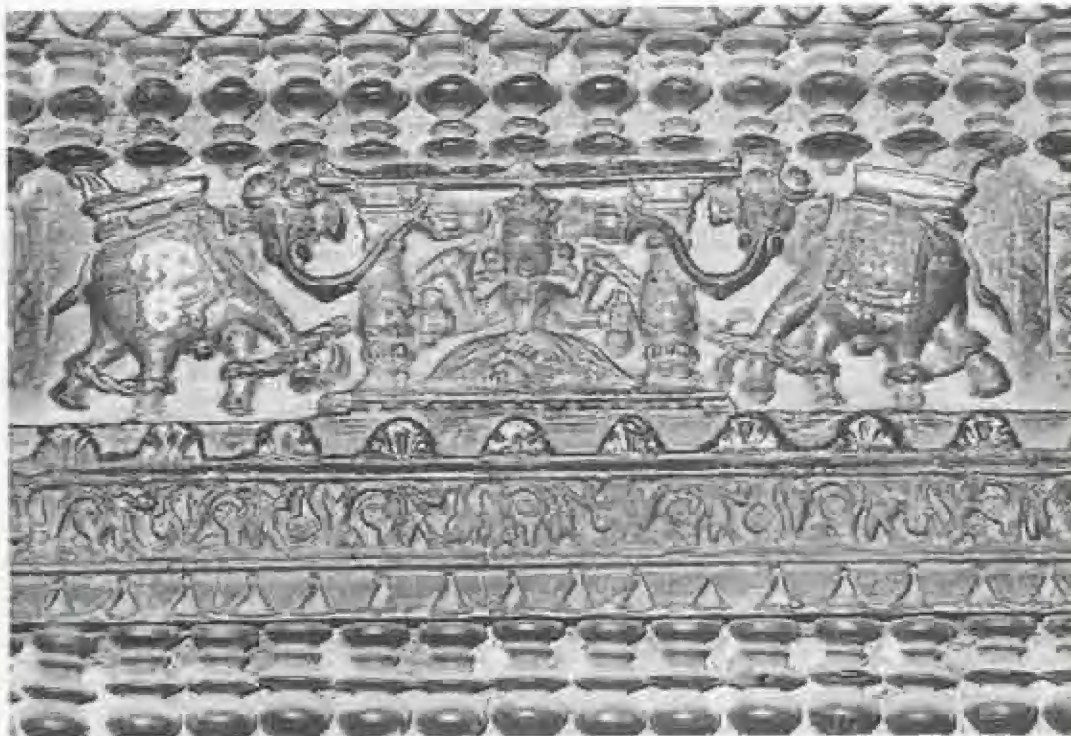


Fig.135. The carved bonding timber shows goddess Laksmi, flanked by elephants.

Fig.136. Carving below the window sill located between the brackets. It shows three standing figures - two holding bows in their hands while third holds a fly-whisk.





belonged, but as usual with Maratha palaces, despite extensive use of wood, the carvings are few.

One noticeable aspect of Patan woodwork is the relative paucity of decorative struts; balconies have small cantilevers supported by brackets. It seems that this is again due to the earlier Muslim influence.

### The Muslims of Patan

The Muslims of Patan deserve a special notice because they form a category quite distinct from the other Muslim communities of Gujarat. Whereas the latter are mostly converts from Hinduism, the former are immigrants who came from West Asia and settled down in Patan after inter-marrying with local Muslims. The converted Muslims of Gujarat such as the Vohras, the Memuns, the Khojas, have retained many social customs of Hinduism and are much less orthodox in their life-style, and this is also reflected in their architecture. The Patan Muslims, on the other hand, have brought and retained a strict orthodoxy which strongly modified the design of the dwelling. They have been described by S. C. Misra in *Muslim Communities in Gujarat* as follows, "Sodagars are a dwindling community of merchants settled in Patan. They appear to have come to Patan from south of Arabia in the Mughal age when it was a flourishing centre of cotton and textile manufacture and intermarried with local Sunni Vohras."<sup>34</sup> (Sodagar is the term for Patan Muslims.)

Our own field observations confirmed their foreign origins. It was only among the Patan Muslims that we encountered the strict purdah system (seclusion of women) in all its Islamic rigidity and where women did not freely come forward to meet us. Many houses were inaccessible for study merely because younger women still lived in them. Those we could study were either in disuse or inhabited by elderly people since the younger had

migrated back to West Asia in recent times. In one rare case we were allowed to work amidst a flourishing family, but the women moved away from each room which we wished to enter.

The strict seclusion of women resulted in a changed house plan where daily social life concentrated itself around the central courtyard. And it was around this central space that the maximum decoration was provided. The front of the house, its veranda, its entrance, became devalued and almost bare of carvings except for some parts of the first floor. This first floor is in reality a mezzanine floor which overlooks the central courtyard on one side and the lane on the other. It was primarily used by women in seclusion to observe the events taking place on the ground. It is called a *sojala* and had rich decoration on the side facing the courtyard, and less on the side facing the lane.

Fig.137. A bracket shaped as stylised elephant head







Fig.138. Part details of the carved ceiling. The first circle shows divine figures male and female alternating, the males holding maces, the females holding fly-whisks.

Its interior also bore decoration for it served as a private socialising area for women, i. e. it was a kind of female *divankhanu*. The male *divankhanu* of Hindu or Jain merchant houses was absent.

The central courtyard contained, apart from the usual repertoire of carved doors, columns and windows, the following novel features:

(a) The walls around the courtyard were honey-combed with decorative niches, each framed by a carved fringe in wood.

(b) Wall cupboards appeared frequently, with carved fringes, the shelves full of imported crockery and bric-a-brac.



Fig.139. A scene of carved ceiling. There are figures of mythical nagins encircling a raised centre piece consisting of a large pendant





Fig.140. A plaque is fixed on one of the corner of the ceiling.

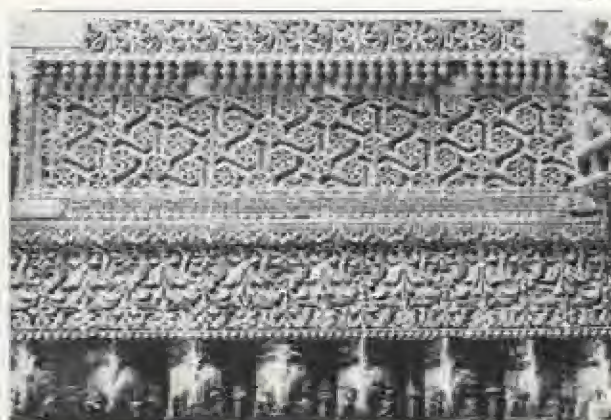


Fig.141. A view of balcony running around the courtyard. The balustrade is flat and offers a great choice of geometrical patterns.

(c) Shelves ran all around the courtyard just above the door lintel level, and carried chinaware plates and bowls.

(d) The opening of the roof over the courtyard was lined with an edging of carved wood, and in some cases with inscriptions cut into it in Arabic.

(e) To one side of the courtyard was an alcove with a bench for intimate

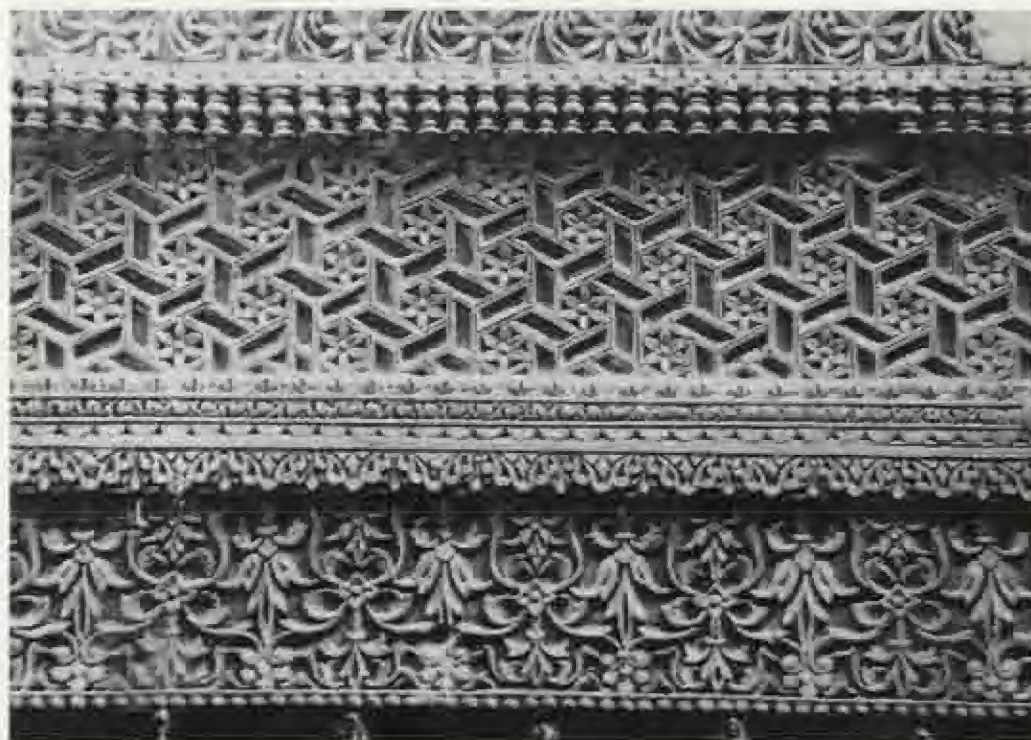


Fig.142. A close-up of balcony at fig. 141. The flowers are arranged geometrically as a fine mesh over the whole surface.





Fig.143. The up-rights on the balcony bear divine human figure. It is wearing leafy trousers.



Fig.144. Another up-right on the balcony with divine human figure. It is stiff despite movement of hands and legs.

conversation : it too was fringed in wood.

(f) The ceilings were all carved with rosettes in high relief.

(g) The *sojala* front consisted of arched windows with balustrades, the whole richly carved. The road-side front was panelled in wood with slight carvings. It was this panelled front which was later developed in the houses of Ahmedabad into intricately carved elevations. The *sojala* of Patan is unique : it is not found in any Muslim dwelling elsewhere in Gujarat. This feature alone would prove the foreign origin of these Muslims.

Among the non-Muslim houses, there are very few Hindu or Jain houses of any great

significance : some are illustrated. There are some fine wooden Jain temple interiors, but the most magnificent specimen of all has gone abroad permanently, namely to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

### Examples

#### House of Abdulgani Nurwali, Raktavad :

There is an elevation which is characteristically stepped back into three receding fronts. The plain exterior has arched full-length windows on the first floor and a plain wood panelled front on the second floor. The apparent first floor is in fact the *sojala*. The simplicity of this elevation may be compared with Hindu or Jain houses further on.

Fig. 28b : Shows the carved wood edging to the sides of the central opening ( closed off



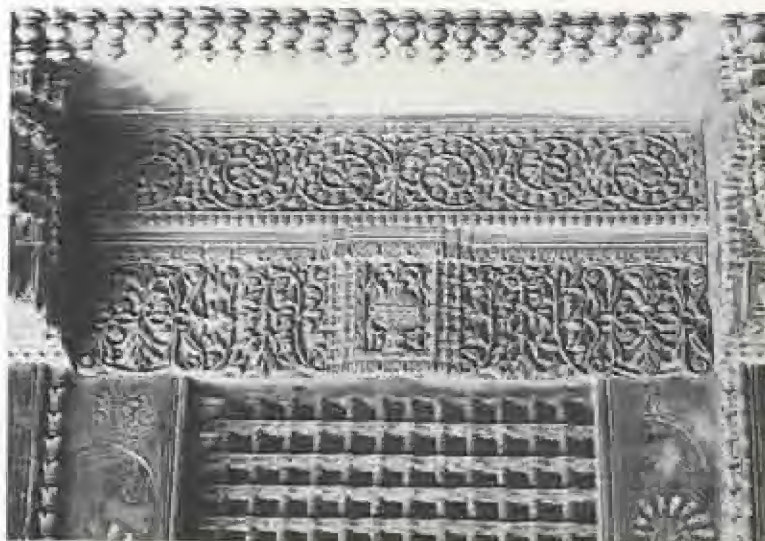


Fig.145. A decorative window around central court-yard. To either side of the jambs are finely carved plaques (top).



Fig.146. The twin lintel of the window shown in fig. 145. A row of beading separates two patterns. The centre-piece is an auspicious vase, (*kalash*) (middle).

with iron frill for safety ). The row of droplets and pendants are very similar to the Muslim-influenced carvings of Palanpur and Radhanpur. Note the Arabic inscription in the centre of the fascia board. The carving of the lower tier of flowers and leaves is very clearly of West Asian origin. (Fig. 29)

Facing the entrance is the door leading to an inner room : its construction and carvings are quite foreign to Gujarat. The planks of the shutter are left plain, the usual

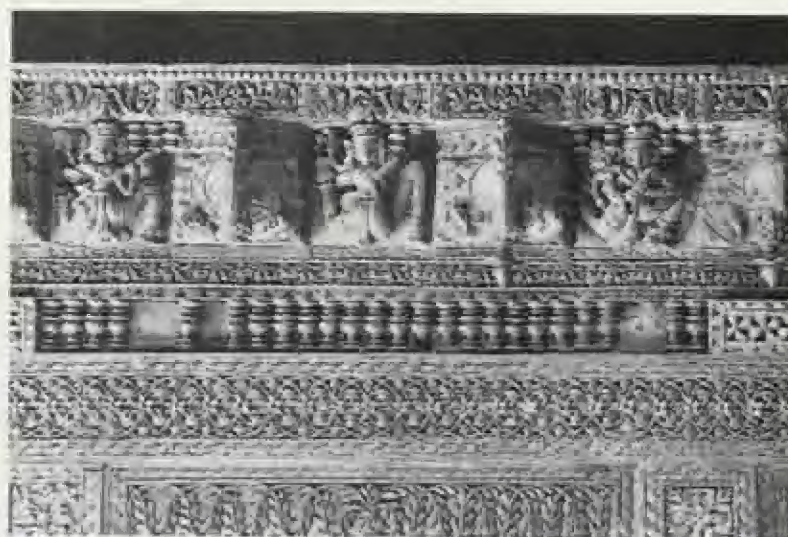


Fig.147. There is a running shelf over the window decorated with a frieze of pendants. There is a projected sill supported by brackets shaped as elephant heads.



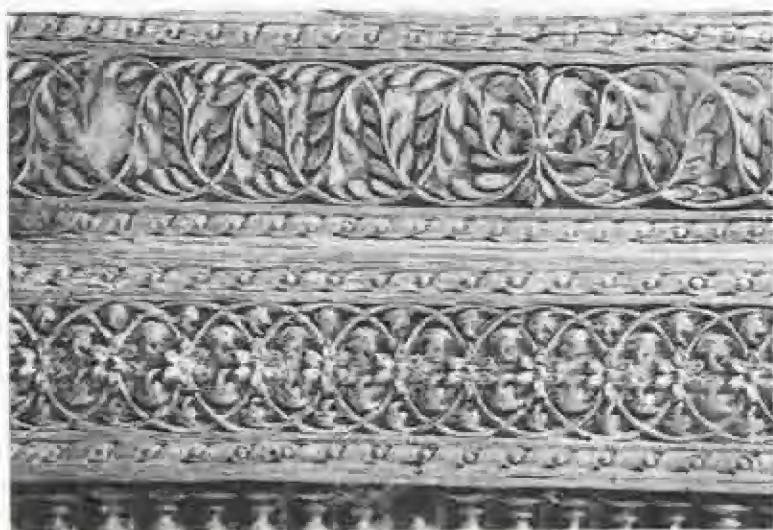


Fig.148. The lintel of the window at figure 145 is in two ranges. The upper range shows over-lapping circles and over-lapping meanders with attached foliage (left).

Fig.149. Small figures have been carved between elephant shaped brackets supporting the sill (below).

overlay of ledges and battens is absent, and only the centre cover bead is typical. The continuous floral pattern on the whole length of the jambs is non-Gujarati, for these are normally left plain. Note the shelf bearing crockery over the lintel.

Figs. 30, 31: These are partial views of an internal column. The carving on the surface of the capital is quite unlike normal Gujarati work in which its structural character is more emphasized. What dominates there is the profile while here it is the surface. A similar surface treatment exists in all the Patan Muslim houses. Fig. 30 is a fine example of how the normal Gujarati column shaft changes from a circular cross-section to a square one at the upper level, and how the flat section bears two profiles originally meant for struts (here absent). The contrast between the relatively lightly carved surface and the corner floral sprays is masterly done; note also how part of the flat surface design projects onto the shaft.

Fig. 32 : Part view of a carved ceiling around the courtyard; it is made up of strips of



planking of different sizes bearing two sizes of raised rosettes. Similar rosettes are also found sometimes on panelled house fronts. A plain rosette such as this is again non-Gujarati, but it is the source of the design of the more complicated rosettes in ceilings of Ahmedabad.

Fig. 33 : Shows a wall niche fringed with carved wood. The finely executed design is very elegant, including the cusped arch with suspended tendril below. This kind of pierced carving is again non-Gujarati. Note the overhanging shelf, above the fringed one, with typical Gujarati pendants.



Fig. 150. The magnificent door lintel of Bhikhubhai Shelat's house at Umreth. The twin lintels show linear meander in the upper range and broader foliage springing from the corner and expanding upwards and towards the centre.



Figs. 34, 35 : These are views and close-ups of the women's divankhanu or reception room within the *sojla*. All the elements of design are non-Gojarati, especially the carved spandriel

which is obviously borrowed from the Islamic architecture of North India.

In our opinion this is one of the finest carved Muslim residences of Gujarat. The wood



Fig. 151. A close view of the centre of the lintel at fig. 135. There are elephants with trappings holding leaves. They flank the goddess Lakshmi seated in between. The lower centre-piece has four-armed Vishnu, flanked by female whisk-bearers.



is tinted a dark, reddish colour which is most impressive (as opposed to other houses where colour has been applied), and everything has remained unchanged in its original condition. It is an example of a foreign merchant's house adapted to Gujarati conditions.

Having illustrated and described this magnificent house, it is not necessary to show other similar Muslim houses in great detail except where something outstanding occurs or where an interesting comparison can be made.

### Miscellaneous Muslim Details

Figs. 36, 37, 38, 39 : Show a number of carved window grills from some of the houses. These grills appear in a great variety of designs and their profusion in Patan marks the fact that Patan is the source of the design. Actually each grill is over-designed, with carved bars and superimposed flowers, but because each grill is small in size the overall effect is very attractive. The jambs of each grill are also fully carved with a row of more elaborately incised rosettes separated by serrated bands. The lintel and tollas are also carved, with a shelf above, and the sill has a simpler design. Regardless of individual variety in designs, one can see that there exists an over-all unity in all the designs which marks them out as being characteristic of Patan Muslims.

Fig. 40 : These are examples of the carved wall plates located just at the edge of the ceilings. The patterns are non-Gujarati, with potted plants alternating with stylised cypresses, or floral meanders.

Fig. 41 : This feature is quite inexplicable in a Muslim



Fig. 152. The carving of the *tolla* is finely executed. A human figure appears at the level of bracket-capital of the jamb supported on lotus.



Fig. 153. Two jamb bases show an arm retainer and a potted plant.



house : it is a small carved shrine located at various places between wall cupboards. It consists of what is a miniature imitation of the balcony of a Hindu or Jain temple : the canopy is supported by twin columns and curvilinear struts, below is a balustrade identical with the temple *asan* or seat with back-rest. The design is embellished with pendants, while at the side are two clothes' pegs. Noone could explain the reason for this curious feature which no Hindu or Jain dwelling has, i. e. it is not copied from them. That it had some ritual purpose seems to be obvious. Had these been Hindu converts then the custom could have been easily understood, but they were precisely those Muslims who were the most orthodox. However, there is a Hindu feature which faintly corresponds to it, namely a small wall niche meant for oil lamps and it has a pyramidal top. We could discover that these niches had some ritual purpose, and these

shrines appear to be their wooden equivalents, i. e. their purpose belongs to popular folklore, namely protection from any harm.

Turning from example of Muslim houses to Hindu and Jain houses, the following are noteworthy.

#### House of Manubhai Umidhar Desai, Doshivado :

This is one of the most richly carved Hindu or Jain houses in Patan. Unfortunately it was locked and details regarding the family could not be ascertained, nor the interior visited. The elevation shows a deep veranda (*otlo*) with carved columns and struts supporting the light wooden frontage of the upper floor. The centre of this has a very fine cantilevered oriel window with triple arched openings, tapering columns and pierced screens. The whole surface of the panelled front, as also the surfaces of the

Fig. 154. A view of the entrance door. The centre-piece on the lintel contains an enshrined Ganesha with grim-visaged whisk-bearers wearing saris.







Fig.155. A strut with flute playing Krishna in central motif (top left).

Fig.156. Twin struts with floral pattern in carving (top right).

Fig.157. A close-up of balustrade figures. All the figures have religious overtones (bottom left).



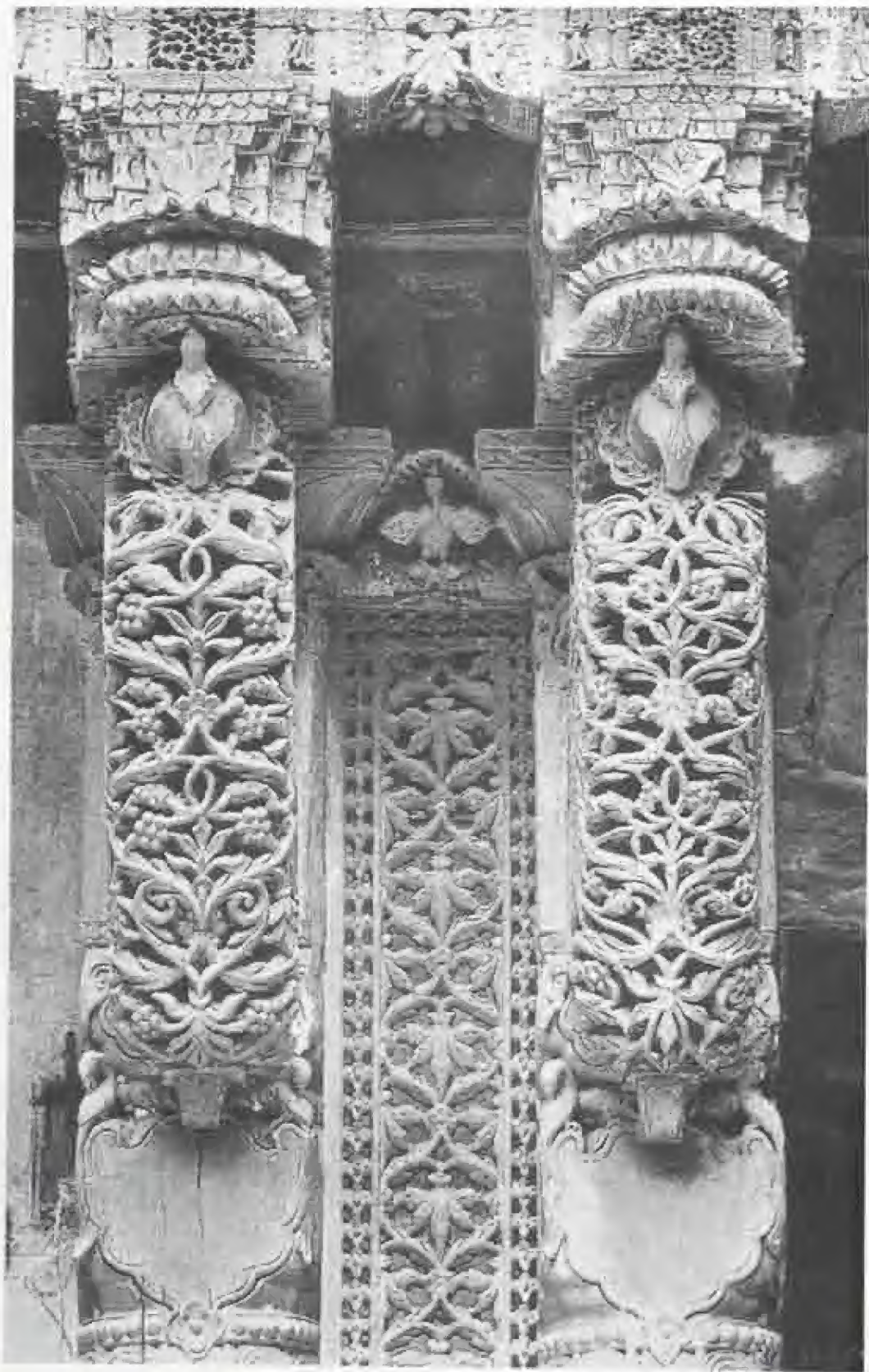


Fig.158. A lintel with an image of a seated ascetic.

Fig.159. A lower lintel with foliage, parrots and a vase. The upper lintel has a pattern of spreading plants.









window shutters, are carved in a very bold floral pattern quite uncharacteristic of Gujarat. Not only is the pattern foreign but also the execution; the surface is not covered with incisions as is so common in typical Gujarati work, but large blank areas are left plain so that high relief and high contrast are produced. The ratio of blank background to carved portions is diagnostic for this kind of foreign influence – here seen in a non-Muslim house. The motif of the potted plant is clearly Islamic, as also the cypresses on the balustrade. (Figs. 42, 43, 44)

#### House of Patni, Khada Khotadani Pado :

This is one of the remarkable houses in Patan in that its woodwork has been untouched with either paint or dyes, so that one can see the carvings in all their pristine clarity. It is also interesting for the wealth of features it presents. The long running balustrade so common in Hindu houses elsewhere is here absent; instead the front is broken up into a series of arched openings set between tapering columns, and small balconies, the whole panelled front supported by tiers of droplets characteristic of Muslim houses. It is obvious that we see the dominant influence of past Muslim rule in this house built much later. This is also proved by the similarity of the arched spandriel of the window at left with that of the Nurwali upper *divankhannu* illustrated goes to demonstrate that the wood carving of Patan was so well developed during Muslim rule, and had reached such a state of excellence, that it continued even when Muslim rule was replaced the Marathas and was accepted by all the groups. The curvilinear balustrade has its surface fully carved with stylised potted plants, flanked by parrots on the uprights. This kind of balcony design re-appears frequently in Patan in Hindu and Jain houses as it has become a dominant model. It is interesting to note how the parrots

have been treated: they hold plants in their beaks, but their tails have been transformed almost into plants.

Unfortunately the column capitals of the ground floor (Fig. 45) show great degeneration of design: the profile has been obliterated and the whole piece, an important structural member, has been transformed into a convoluted, pierced flower quite unsuitable here. The carving is beautiful but misplaced. The beginnings of this kind of baroque treatment can already be seen in Muslim houses (Fig. 46).

#### Miscellaneous Examples :

Fig. 47: Shows the balcony in which there is a fine floral centre-piece on the rail, while the curvilinear surface has a different kind of floral design arranged geometrically, a similar pattern reappears in distant Kapadvanj. The second one has a pattern of long lotus stalks almost resembling some archaic Egyptian design. One can see here how the craftsmen have sought for eclectic variety to please a demanding patronage.

#### Jain Examples from Patan

The most outstanding example of Jain woodwork is that of the temple interior now owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York. This interior was discussed by W. Norman Brown in the *Journal of The Indian Society of Oriental Art* in which he says that according to an inscription the temple was originally constructed in 1594-96, but later enlarged.<sup>55</sup> It is not clearly mentioned whether the woodwork is also from this early date, but it seems very likely. James Burgess and Henry Cousens, in *The architectural Antiquities of Northern Gujarat*, saw this interior *in situ* in 1886-90 and even photographed it, and named it as the Vadi Parsvanatha Temple at Patan.<sup>56</sup> They also confirm the date of 1594, making it one of the earliest, if not the earliest, specimen of Gujarat wood carving.

Fig. 160, Twin struts with a centre piece. At top of each structure birds have been carved (facing page).







As explained, these interiors generally imitate stone construction, especially in the domical portion, so that no further comment is needed. It is only the lower portions where original wood carvings appear and which are of concern to us.

Just below the level of the springing of the dome, there are four canopied balconies with balustrades, in which the construction is again copied from stone but the carvings differ. The form of the supporting columns is imitation stone, but the small figures carved on them, each within a tiny canopied shrine, belongs to the wooden tradition. We shall see similar figures, enlarged, in another example from Kapadvanj where they are described in greater detail. The serpentine struts between columns is again imitation stone. Incidentally, the smaller struts apparently holding up the canopy are false, these being later additions, they were probably inserted by the dealer who sold the woodwork. One can clearly see how they wrongly abut, and obscure, some of the carvings on the columns.

What is of special interest is the carvings on the balustrades which, although dated so early, is almost identical with those of a much later date, proving the persistence of the artistic tradition. The scene depicted is some festival in which people in bullock carts journey to the central figure in a yogic posture under a canopy. Such narrative scenes are found in Jain miniatures and this one is possibly copied from them. But the idea of representing it upon a balustrade is entirely Gujarati; however, the manner in which the carving is deeply cut into the wood is not typical. The floral meanders on the horizontal rails are characteristic of Gujarati work.

Doors with pierced grills can be found

nowhere else in Gujarat and it does not seem to be an original work. It is very likely that the dealer constructed these doors out of remnants of other woodwork in anticipation of a buyer. The manner in which the grills are haphazardly put together, without matching units, seems to prove this.

Among more recent Jain examples, there is a temple in Kapur Mehtano Pado in which the domical vault and upper balconies are very similar to the above, but so overlaid with garish colours that the details are quite submerged. But there are some figures on the columns which are clearer. They are located at the base of the column, each figure placed within a stylised niche, holding a musical instrument. One sees here characteristic features of Gujarati human figures: the squat proportions, the round faces and the costumes. The figures are deeply undercut, almost rounded, and this technique is borrowed from stone carving, but not the figures themselves.

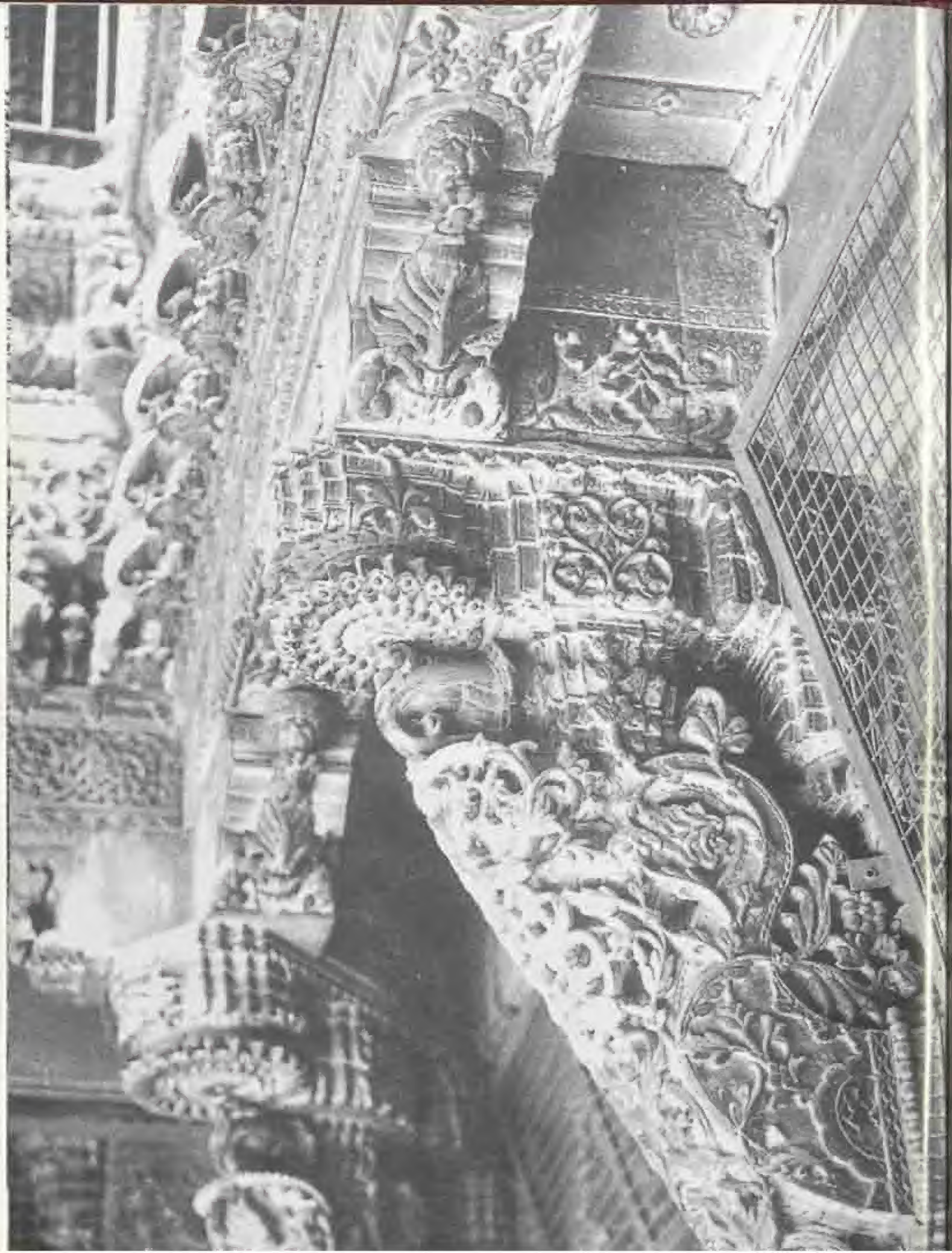
In the Adeshwar Jain temple there is a relatively unspoilt domical vault which again imitates stone. The lower parts of the temple have been renovated but at a few places some finely carved struts salvaged from the original construction are inserted. The human figures are also copied from stone and the difference in the proportions to the squat figures shown earlier is at once apparent.

### Siddhapur

Siddhapur is a very old, historical town with religious associations for Hindus: it is here on the banks of the Sarasvati river that the obsequial offerings to female ancestors are made. It has the famous ruins of the Rudramal temple built in about 944 A. D. by the Chalukyan king Mularaja. The town is dominated by two communities: the Brahmins and the Muslim Vohras. The former are no longer prosperous and their houses are small and insignificant. The Vohras, on the other

Fig.161. A general view of the area around the central courtyard of a house. The first floor shows plainness of the woodwork where as the ground floor is more decorative (facing page).







hand, have prospered so much that most of their old houses have been torn down and replaced with those of colonial design. The latter, although of wood, have incorporated so much eclectic and degenerate motifs that they are not worth illustrating except as curiosities.

#### Examples :

##### Balcony of Asmabhai Hussain, Vohra vad :

This is a very fine surviving specimen of a kind of decorative balcony which must have once been more numerous in North Gujarat. Its particular beauty lies in the lightness and slenderness of the construction, and its adherence to traditional forms. The supports are in two tiers: first there are smaller struts with carved panels in between (similar to Palanpur) ; below this there are lighter beams and twin struts.

##### Lintel of Chinwala House, Vohra vad :

This is one of the most unique lintel centre-pieces seen by us in Gujarat. It is a Vohra Muslim house, i. e. of Muslims who were converts from Hinduism, and the design shows the adaptation of a traditional Hindu or Jain lintel centre-piece to Islamic requirements. Instead of a Hindu *kalasha* (vase of plenty a Hindu symbol of auspiciousness.), we find Arabic inscriptions placed within borders.

##### Kapadvanj

Kapadvanj has preserved the largest and richest concentration of surviving woodwork in Gujarat. Very little of the town has been renovated so that one can see wooden architecture, and wood carving, in almost pristine condition. However, most of the construction is late 19th century A. D. so that the carving shows a baroque-like richness but not yet a degeneration of style except in the Vohra Muslim houses. The town is dominated

by two communities : Jains and Muslim Vohras. The latter have their separate enclave, called the Vohra vad, where a majority of the houses are built in the 'Bombay' eclectic style in which colonial and Gujarati motifs are jumbled together. But, nevertheless, they are very interesting curiosities and representatives of an attitude of mind. The Jain houses are large and spacious with much carved woodwork.

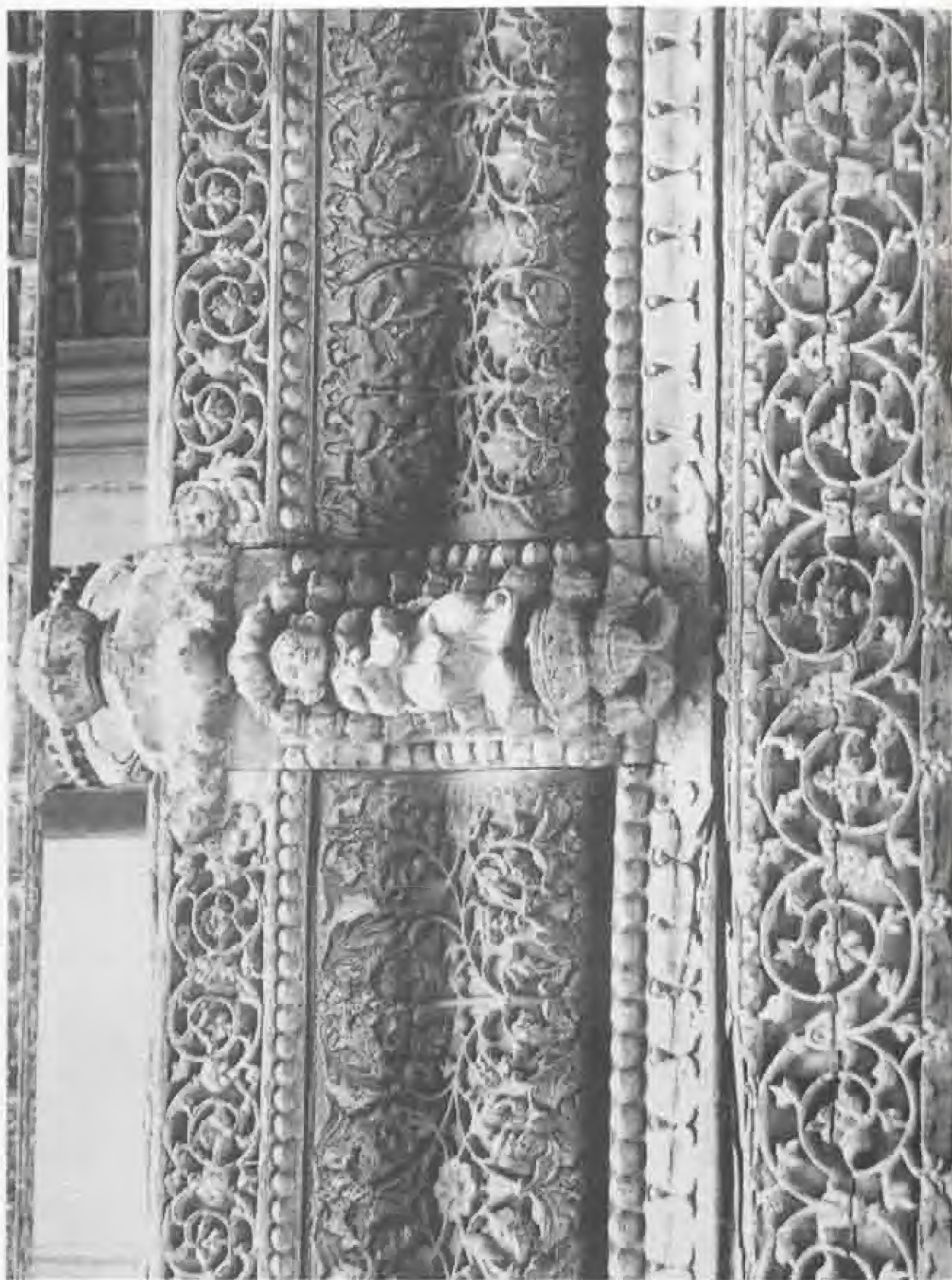
A favourite motif in the Hindu and Jain houses is a figural strut depicting a human figure holding a plant in his hands which sweeps upward in a rich display. Such figures appear in great profusion in numerous houses and demonstrate how a particular motif gains popularity and becomes characteristic for a particular town. Two or three houses in Ahmedabad have copied it. Now, this figure holding a vine is a very ancient motif, appearing in a Gupta temple at Deogarh of the 5th century A. D. As already mentioned, the association of plants and human or semi-human figures goes back even earlier to Buddhist art where it is the mythical *yaksha* which sprouts plants.

Another very characteristic feature of Kapadvanj is the rear balcony. The normal Gujarati house has balconies in front; the rear usually presents a blank surface to ensure security. The Kapadvanj houses, under the influence of Muslim Vohra architecture, opened up the upper floors with numerous windows, doors and projecting balconies. These rear elevations thus presented a very rich view from the lanes which they face; they were in fact more impressive than the formal entrances. The Vohra houses, from where this feature developed, made their rear balconies into elements of intricate and varied display, and some of the most novel designs are found in Kapadvanj, as the illustrations will show.

In keeping with this display of the rear, windows received elaborate treatment. Each window has an ornate metal grill of a kind

Fig. 162. The curvilinear uprights of the balustrade and exquisitely carved struts of central courtyard at figure 161 (facing page).







which seems to have been borrowed from Saurashtra - where it is the typical feature and is less common in North Gujarat. The ultimate origin may be West Asia. The window corners bear elegant floral carvings, and there are carved consoles or brackets at the sill level. These windows are brightly coloured and look very attractive. (Fig. 48)

### Examples

#### People's Cooperative Bank, Gandhi Chowk

This residence has now been converted into a bank but with the woodwork left undisturbed. It has a very elegant frontage with a columned veranda above which runs a long balcony with tapering columns and arched *kamans*. These tapering columns carry diagonal poles which support a wide over-hanging weather-shade, also of wood. The balcony balustrade is, unusually, also made of metal mesh. Very few Gujarati houses have this and it indicates that it is only a recent feature.

Just below the balustrade are strips of carved fascia boards quite unlike normal Gujarati work. The usual Gujarati system was to have frieze either of elephant heads (masking the joist end) or of droplets (as in Muslim houses). A clue to the origin of this novel feature is provided by the cable carving on two of the strips. This kind of carving is not typical of Gujarat, neither of Hindu or Muslim designs, and seems to be very clearly European. The British administration had by this time well established itself in many parts of Gujarat, and it must be through that presence that this feature appears in Kapadvanj (as also in some houses in Ahmedabad and Nadiad).

Another interesting motif here, seen twice, once at the second row from the top of the cornice, and then on the lowest, is a flower

bud with five upturned petals. Now, this same motif is found all over Gujarati in locations far from each other ; it occurs most frequently in the Baroda area, but also in distant Mundra in Saurashtra. It is striking to find it also in a Buddhist pilaster from Mathura dated 450 A. D. <sup>56</sup>. If this be the true source of the motif, which seems certain, then one may be justified in assuming that many more such decorative motifs were equally borrowed from Mathura and whose stone originals have disappeared. This eclectic borrowing of extraneous motifs is, however, particularly prominent in Kapadvanj among Gujarat towns. (Fig. 49)

This eclecticism can be seen in the verandah column (Fig. 50) which is circular for its full length, ending in a circlet of beads - the whole design is foreign to Gujarat. Fixed awkwardly to the circular face of the shaft is a huge strut out of proportion to the column. The strut itself is beautifully designed and carved but does not match the column. It proves that each part was carved independently by different carvers and then put together without regard to unity of design. However, each individual part is by itself finely executed and represents a real tradition, it is the ensemble which is faulty.

The strut (Figs. 51, 52) has a large floral design which is found elsewhere also, i. e. it is a typical design, with deep undercutting ; what is new is the addition of human figures at the base. The male figure, wearing Maratha costume, holds the stalk of a rising vine and he is flanked by two women bearing fly-whisks, dressed in saris. The sari never appears in traditional Gujarati work : it is always the skirt. Note how the faces are sharper and the whole posture quite different from the usual Gujarati figures.

A curious wooden member is seen in (Fig. 52) at the corner of the balcony. It flares upwards dramatically from the bracket capital like a convoluted plant. It is in fact the capping

Fig. 163. A close-up of the figure on the balustrade upright. It bears musical instrument and wears archaic costume (facing page).





Fig.164. Details of fully carved curvilinear surface of the balustrade. The design show cypresses, potted plants and floral abstractions. The floral meander on the fascia board has coils reversed alternately.

piece to mask a beam-end. Similar flaring beam-ends are common in Ahmedabad.

Fig. 48 shows an outer window of almost classical design: it is this kind of window which is repeated all over Kapadvanj and is its speciality. The outer frame is plain; the inner one sparingly carved at the corners with a fine floral pattern; and a running bead pattern all around. It should be mentioned that similar beading appears in the Indo-Greek art of Gandhara and also in Gupta art at the beginning of the era. The contrast between the carved and the blank portions, and their relative ratio, is perfect. The sill has a projecting ledge supported by carved consoles, with carved

infilling panels in between. All the floral patterns on this window are typically Gujarati, but of a period after about 1850 A. D.

The frames of the window are without *tollas* and are mitred at the corners: the absence of the former and the presence of the latter is conclusive evidence of a late date for its construction. This technique seems to have entered Gujarat along with the Marathas, i. e. it is of Deccan origin. It is made possible by the use of lime mortar in place of the earlier mud mortar in the masonry. Note how the frames are tied in at two levels with the bonding timbers. At the right is a projecting carved holder for an oil lamp, and above it is a niche also for an oil lamp. The projecting one was used when it was wind-still. The use of metal for grill (and balustrades) is, as we saw, common in Kapadvanj.

Fig. 53 is a detail from the crossing of two beams over a column. The beams are not carved, in keeping with good carpentry practice; the small carved portions at the corner are actually separate pieces subsequently nailed on. The beading also belongs, not to the beams, but to the fascia board above it. We see here in great clarity the two-armed bracket-capital resting upon a capital, supported by a square column. The carving on the bracket-capital is of the ornate kind already seen at the Patni house in Patan, as also the Muslim houses there. There free-standing square column is again a sign of Maratha influence: the normal free-standing Gujarati column is circular along most of its shaft and never left plain as seen here.

Fig. 54 shows in greater clarity the carved panel which is often nailed onto a main beam to produce a decorative effect. The floral motifs are quite typical of the traditional Gujarati work. It is important to note the rather

Fig.165. A very interesting carved ceiling. Small, fretted pieces of wood are nailed to a background of plank (facing page).



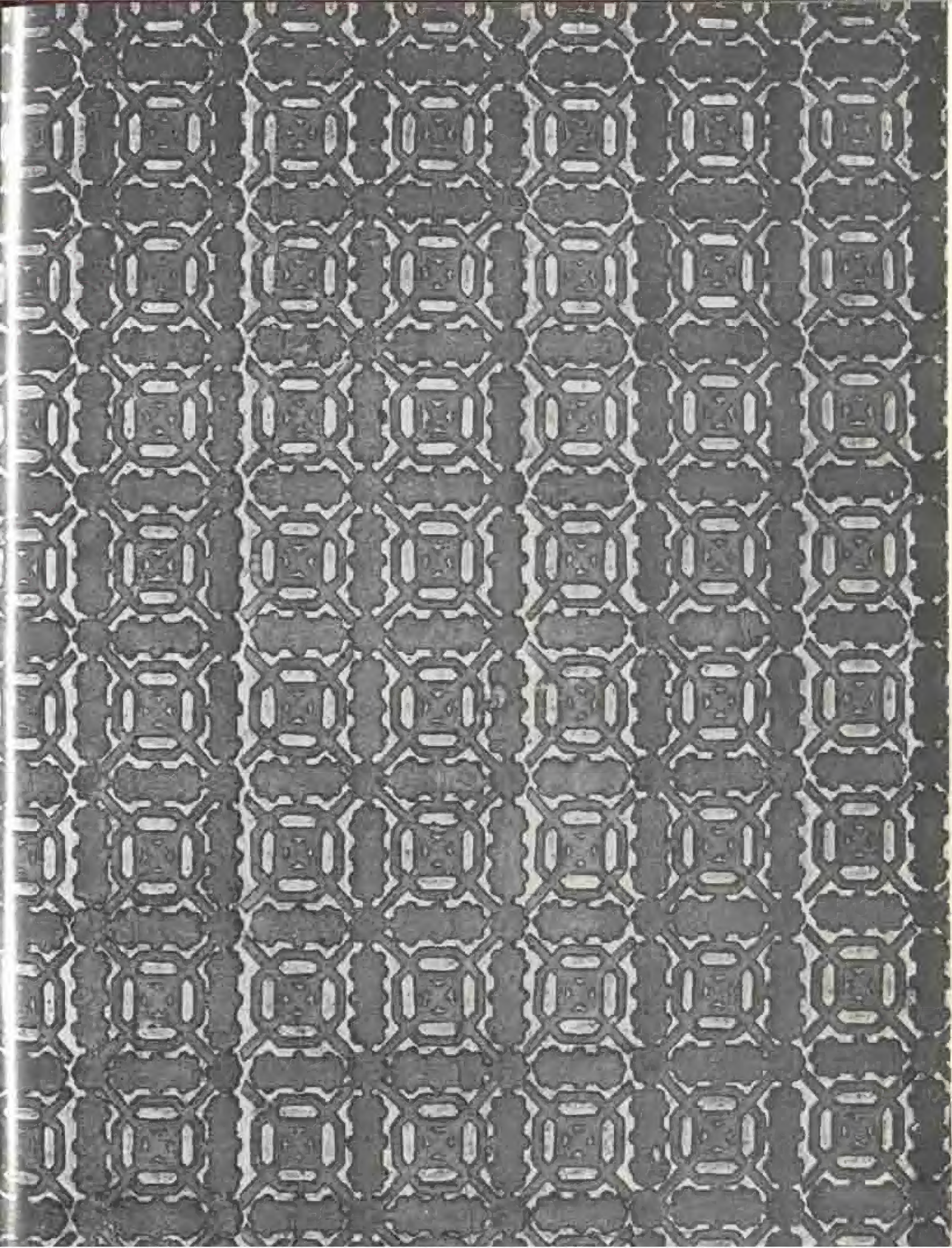






Fig.166. The strut portrays females holding a drum. The figure is in full length of the strut.



Fig.167. The strut with a female holding a sarangi. Both the figures on this page are not carved out of the strut but are themselves struts.

convoluted profile which the ends of the panel show. This profile is borrowed from that of a traditional bracket-capital, and all the older bracket-capitals in North Gujarat work. The projecting member below it is a cap to mask the end of the extended arm of the part of the bracket-capital at right-angles to the beam (the bracket-capital is four armed.)

#### Amtha Parikhni Sheri

This is a street with a row of houses all of which have their rear elevations facing the lane opened up in the characteristic fashion of Kapadvanj, with long balconies, doors and windows, protected by a large weather shade supported on diagonal poles (Fig. 55). This arrangement is so common in Kapadvanj that one might call it the hallmark of its architecture. The elements which form it are: huge struts which rise up from attached columns embedded

within the walls and support light joists called flying purlins, which in turn support the balcony and the superstructure of the tapering columns of the floor above. These tapering columns support the weather-shade and roof, and are linked together by decorative *kamanis*. Windows with metal grills lie between struts.

Fig. 56 shows a close-up of the balcony. At the bottom is the carved strut, at its head the masked end of the extended arm of the bracket-capital, but here formed into an exaggerated cap carved as an elephant head crowned by a peacock – the piece is so large that it even covers the beam face. To either side of it are the normal brackets. The plain beam supports, firstly, a curvilinear fascia board, and above it, the curvilinear balustrade. The usual row of elephant heads is missing, being replaced by the fascia board. The carving on this – stylised



Fig.168. A Vaishnava composition is carved onto the curvilinear surface. The flute playing Krishna as a cowherd flanked by fly-whisks bearers and a calf suckling the cow,



birds spouting plants – strongly resembles similar motifs found in Ahmedabad and will be discussed later. The technique in which the carving is done is to leave a part of the original block plain, to hollow out the curvature in the remaining part, and carve the plain portion last. The curvilinear balustrade is covered with a

finely incised floral pattern similar to that seen in Patan. The upright has, instead of the usual human figure, a bird-and-plant design. Note the prominence and effectiveness of the beading as an element which separates different area of the carving.



Fig.169. A conventional flute-playing Krishna is flanked by fly-whisk bearers. To either side are lions seizing creatures.



### House of Kantilal Parikh

This house has some of the finest carved figural struts seen by us in Gujarat (Fig. 57 to 62). It consists of typical Kapadvanj features but executed with a skill beyond the ordinary. Each strut has a floral S-shaped design (see the side view) similar to that already seen in the Cooperative Bank. At its base are human figures in sets of three, a central larger figure flanked by two smaller ones, holding various objects. Some hold the rising vine, others a staff, and one holds a musical instrument. The costumes are either *dhotis* with great, flaring ends swirling out behind, or saris. The males wear Marathi turbans, have caste marks on the forehead, and their features are sharp – quite unlike the round faces of typical Gujarati figures. The face that Marathi features and costumes appear does not mean that Marathi craftsmen worked here: the Gujarati craftsman was quite capable of turning out details to satisfy changing norms. In Ahmedabad, for example, the figures look Rajasthani.

At the top of the struts are carved small figures of musicians or birds, even a lion with a human face. These eclectic frills are restrained and do not disturb the overall unity of the design.

A point of interest arises if one compares the Maratha like figures with those of typical indigenous Gujarati character. It will then be noticed that whereas the Gujarati figures seek to portray divine creatures, the Maratha ones are clearly secular. For example, the figures holding musical instruments in traditional work are stiff, stylised beings, with type-faces (not ethnic or individual), and often with bent legs indicating that they are flying or standing upon lotuses. Such figures are mythical and legendary: they are *apsaras* and *vidyadharas*. But the Maratha (or Rajasthani) figures are borrowed from secular and courtly life: they portray court musicians, or armed retainers, wear every-day dress, and have more of individual faces. The contrast clearly reveals that the indigenous art form seeks its models

Fig.170. The upright figure is a mithuna scene in which a couple playfully tease each other. The male is wearing a Maratha style turban.



Fig.171. The upright figure of a couple the male in aristocratic dress, with a crown in place of a turban.



Fig.172. An ascetic with matted hair and rosary in one hand, a female standing beside him.





Fig.173. This upright figure shows a female seated on a wickerwork stool holding a gleeful youngster.

from religious myth; the Maratha and Rajasthani influenced art seeks its models from a feudal aristocracy. The difference is not one of style but of attitude.

Another difference in carving becomes apparent if one compares various struts. In some, the leaves of the plant are smaller and thinner, being little broader than the stems, so that more vacant space is left between them. In the latter, the breadth of the leaves almost fills up all available space, producing less contrast. These differences are stylistic, and a somewhat similar difference occurs in many parts of Gujarat. It seems to us that the thinner and more minute leaves are indigenous, while the broader leaves are foreign in design. One could describe the foreign design as more naturalistic and the indigenous as more abstract. Yet, both are executed by the same craftsmen, as the base figures prove. In other words, differences in style does not always mean that different hands are at work.



Fig.174. An erotic couple on a balustrade. Note the maratha influence in costume.



Fig.175. A group of three figures from a dance scene. The female wears a frilled skirt and is flanked by two males.



Fig.176. A scene of domestic bliss in which a husband and a wife are shown holding hands.







Fig.177. Upright figure at the corner shows warrior armed with a lance and bow, wearing a helmet with a crescent.



Fig.178. A trio of religious figures with a four-armed male in the centre, carrying a mace and flanked by whisk-bearers.

### Green House, Desaivada

This house caught our eyes because of the bright, green colour of the woodwork and the maroon of the walls. The contrast is startling, yet pleasing. It is not necessary to describe the carvings: they are repetitive of those seen above, but it is their totality here which is so attractive.

### Strut in Babuki Haveli, Lambi Sheri

This is a very fanciful variant of the composite beast motif: partly elephant, partly lion and partly bird. The trunk coils up in a fantastic manner and merges with the plants in the front. The body is covered with fish-scales. Between the feet are the trio of human figures and a flute-player, flanked by females bearing fly-whisks. The figures are crudely carved, and the whole composition is unfit and it is a late production.

### House of Pankaj I. Shah, Dholikui

The gradual degeneration of taste in Kapadvanj reaches a pitch in the carvings of this house. The ascending vine is now held by two figures which have become mythical: note the unreal costumes and head-dress. It shows the corner of the cornice with the masking caps of beam-ends: the design has become completely obscured by the piling up of motif upon motif regardless of the composition.

### Domestic Shrine of Manubhai Joshi, Dholikui

This is a Brahmin family with a domestic shrine of Krishna and consort Radha. The shrine is modelled on the *ghar derasars* (domestic shrines) of Jains among whose community they are very common. The front of the shrine is of wood with a doorway having



jambos partly imitating the columns – this feature is copied from Hindu and Jain temples. The lintel is also carved, and above is a canopy bearing replicas of the *shikhuras* of temple. The most interesting features for our purpose are the lintel and the jambos.

The lintel has two horizontal members, both carved with a characteristic floral pattern; the lower member has as its centre-piece a very typical feature, namely the elephant-god Ganesha seated within a shrine, flanked by two females bearing fly-whisks. Ganesha appears on many door lintels in Gujarat as he represents a guardian figure and is also a "destroyer of obstacles". There are some indications that this motif has its origins in Maharashtra. The small shrine has twin tapering columns with spirals, which are not Gujarati columns: the females wear typical Maratha saris, and their features are non-Gujarati.

The jambos are very elaborately carved with vertical strips of design, each recessed in receding planes, forming the *bhadra* character already referred to above. These strips of carving consist of particular motif repeated endlessly all the way up. There is, for example, a tapering, spiral column and capital in one strip. This manner of producing receding strips is found in temple architecture. The centre of the jambos has series of small enshrined figures terminating at the bottom with a large guardian figure (Figs. 63, 64). The small enclosing shrines have the same kind of tapering columns as in the Ganesha shrine on the lintel, plus a cusped arch. The general character of the small figures is squat and badly proportioned – quite unlike temple figures, they all represent divine beings, with most holding musical instruments; in one case the figure has a serpent emerging from between its legs: this is garuda, the mythical bird-vehicle of god Vishnu which destroys snakes.

The larger guardian figures at the base of the jambos are better proportioned: one figure holds a staff, the other a fly-whisk, i.e. they are like courtiers serving the deity.

Note the portion of carving between the enshrined figures on the jambos: it represents a kind of pedestal of petals and its purpose is to separate and fill in the gaps between the shrines. Such neutral 'fillers' are very common in Gujarati work, and it is from one of these that the droplets in Muslim fronts was fashioned.

### Shantinath Jain Temple, Dhakwala Khadki, Ohri Chakla

Jain temples generally have a very rich patronage so that their decorations, whether wooden or otherwise, are among the most elaborate in Gujarat. Unfortunately, this great wealth is not always invested with good taste: often the decorations become tawdry and the carvings excessively ornate and garishly painted. In this case also, the carvings are overdone and brightly painted so that the overall effect is dazzling (Figs. 65, 66). If one looks closely at the woodwork, it will be noticed that the cusped *kamans* were not part of the original design: they have been added later to the pre-existing columns and capitals which, not having straight edges, produced problems at the junctions. These have been artificially solved, and it is these *kamans* which actually create the sense of 'too much'.

Each *kaman* has very deep cusps, with large buds forming their terminations. The foliage carved on the surface is not well-designed, having no beginning and end. The reason is that so much surface was rarely available to the wood carved, and when it was, it was usually a rectangular form which could be covered with an even pattern. Here the surface contour is irregular and the attempt to cover it has proved too difficult.





Fig.179. A figure wearing a helmet with a crescent, holding a bow and standing before a cow.

The colours used remind one of those used in miniatures.

### Muslim Vohras Houses

As already mentioned, most of the Muslim Vohra houses revel in an eclectic style which might be called the 'Bombay style', in which contradictory motifs are haphazardly thrown together producing much confusion.

However, in one house a very remarkable and traditional style of carving was found and it is extensively illustrated because of the excellent lighting conditions (not found in all houses in Gujarat on account of the narrowness of the lanes).

### Vohra House

Figs. 67, 68, 69 shows the entrance door with double *toffas* placed above each other. The lower one is carved as a typical elephant-head,

Fig.180. A moist-achioed male standing beneath a canopy of snake-heads, flanked by female whisk-bearers.



Fig.181. A giant in regal dress carrying a male and female on his shoulders.



Fig.182. An erotic group showing male and female in a dancing pose.







Fig.183. A very attractive centre-piece shows simplicity of patterns which is very well distributed with empty spaces left in between. The birds are very effectively integrated in the design.

the upper has recessed planes and partly geometrical and partly floral patterns. The circular, ribbed disc at its lower end is a very characteristic and common motif in Gujarati wood carving. It appears in numerous locations, never by itself but as an adjunct to other carvings. The *tollas* are linked by two lintels, both very finely carved. It will be noticed that the upper lintel floral pattern is identical with that in the domestic shrine lintel shown earlier; the lower lintel pattern is also very similar except that the foliage has a beginning, i. e. it springs from a main stalk next to the *tollas*. Both patterns are very common in Gujarat, particularly in Ahmedabad and Umreth. They represent the evenly spread out pattern characteristic of wood carving of an early period. The lower lintel has, in addition, a centre-piece which, being in a Muslim house where figural work is generally prohibited, has only the recessed *bhadra* arrangement with a plain border in the centre.

The door has the typical twin jambs of Gujarati doors, with square capitals, and only the latter are carved. The lower lintel has projections just above the inner jamb capital (in line with the elephant-heads) facing inwards, shaped into the profile we saw earlier for bracket-capitals, along with a droplet. These projecting ends interfere with the corners of the shutters which have to be cut away very awkwardly in order to accommodate these projections. This kind of awkward corner is nevertheless extremely common in North Gujarat, obviously because it enhanced the decorative effect of the entrance.

The shutters are relatively plain, having only carved ledges all around and a centre cover bead. This doorway is a good example of what a model doorway should look like in a respectable Gujarati house.

Figs. 70,71 show views of twin columns and twin struts of the verandah. The manner of joinery, the proportions and the carvings are





Fig.184. Marathi amorous couple where the male has a drum and one arm around the female's shoulder, while she offers him a cup of wine.

of a classical purity unspoilt by the additions of eclectic features seen earlier. The column has the traditional fluted shaft which becomes square in the upper range in order to provide abutment for the strut. This is the correct technique of dealing with this problem : those columns which are circular up to the top are wrongly designed. The square portion of the shaft is sub-divided into two compartments, one at the level of the strut abutment and the other above it. The latter has a square face with a border enclosing an abstract pattern. The lower compartment is in turn sub-divided into two halves: the floral pattern covers the whole area but is pinched in at the middle. This particular detail is found throughout North Gujarat and its wide-spread persistence is remarkable. It



Fig.185. There is a couple drinking wine. The man's face shows marvellous smile.

influences the design of the abutting strut which also has to match it by breaking its side pattern into two parts: the S-shaped curvature starts at the upper part, the lower end has an independent tapering bunch of flowers. The S-shape of the floral design on the strut is one of the model designs found all over North Gujarat ( it is the one appearing in Kapadvanj accompanied with vine-holding human figures. Some parts of it are pierced through and others are carved deeply into the wood. This is one of the rare members which has such depth of incision. Note how its upper end fits into the extended arm of the bracket-capital above, with one point just touching the ribbed disc.

The top of the column has a capital of square shape with a mixed design at the sides



and a circlet of beading at the junction with the shaft. A similar beading appears at the base of the strut and at the level of the column where circular form changes into a four-sided one. It seems that beading is generally placed where a change of pattern occurs, i. e. it is a kind of border (this also appears in the Amtha Parikh balconies).

The twin struts are very similar but not identical in design: there are minute differences in the floral carvings which become apparent only on close examination. This proves that either two separate carpenters were at work under a general supervision or the same carpenter produced both varieties. Whether this was deliberate is difficult to say.

Fig. 72 shows a detail from the carved, pierced panel located between the shafts of the twin columns. This kind of purely decorative panel also appears frequently in Ahmedabad: it is an example of the introduction of a non-structural element into the architecture.

The above house is a Muslim Vohra house but all of its carvings are common throughout Gujarat irrespective of religious affiliations. In other words, it is typical of Gujarat as a whole and that is why it has so extensively been described here. When we meet with similar designs in the following towns, it will, then, not be necessary to go into such detailed description.

The Muslim Vohra houses of Kapadvanj are remarkable for their rear balconies at ground floor level. These are used by family members, particularly women and children, to sit about and chat with passers-by; in other words, they are the counterpart of the Hindu and Jain front veranda or *otlo*. The ground floor balcony is never found in Hindu and Jain houses even in Kapadvanj (they have the *otlo* for socialising) and is a speciality of Vohra houses because the rear room in these houses is the main reception area for guests. This has led to these balconies being elaborately carved with the most

extraordinary variety of designs, as the illustrations will show. But in every case the designs are foreign to Gujarat. Some are clearly European, others West Asian. The Vohras were well known for their foreign trading contacts and they deliberately brought in these foreign designs to assert their identity. The carvings are very finely executed and it is difficult to say who the craftsmen were or how exactly the patterns were copied. It is however certain that they were never repeated within Gujarat itself (Figs. 73, 74).

### Ahmedabad

Ahmedabad was the capital of Gujarat. It was founded in 1411 A. D. by the local Muslim Sultans after they had made themselves independent of Delhi. Thereafter, the capital was temporarily shifted to Mahmudabad, then to Champaner near Baroda, and finally back to Ahmedabad. Gujarat was re-conquered by the Mughals in 1572-73 who ruled it through their governors posted in Ahmedabad. Some of these were Rajputs and that is how Rajasthani influence penetrated Gujarat intermittently. Maratha subsequently invaded Gujarat and occupied various portions for varying periods, baring Baroda and finally relinquished all territories to the British. In this manner, Ahmedabad received impulses from three groups: Rajasthani, Maratha and British, and from there it spread to other centres. But in the final analysis, the patronage remained largely Hindu and Jain and outside impulses were subordinated to their wishes.

The situation of the Muslims in Ahmedabad is very strange. Despite the city having been once under strong Muslim rule, we could not find many significant Muslim residences. All of them could not have been destroyed by invaders. This paucity of substantial Muslim residences has social and political reasons which are partly explained earlier. Briefly, the main reason was the lack of



urban security during Muslim rule leading to a situation where citizens were not inclined to make a great display in their architecture. But while this insecurity affected all citizens equally, in the case of Muslims there were other contributing factors. The leading Muslims of the period lived from administration to soldiering, both very precarious occupations. A change of masters might mean the end of a lucrative position.

Again, it was forbidden for Muslims in such occupations to automatically inherit property. Upon the death of a nobleman his property reverted to the crown to be disposed at will. Lastly, these professions were dependent upon the king and they had to constantly reside in his vicinity. But the Muslim ruler was accustomed to change his residence on whim (note the changes in the capitals) - for years on end. Thus, given all these peculiar circumstances, it was not advisable to construct any substantial residences when neither inheritance nor residence was assured. In other words, such Muslim residences have genuinely disappeared because they were never designed for posterity. It was only the Muslims engaged in commercial activities who, like the Hindus and Jains, built substantial houses.

However, some of the surviving residences are listed below:

- (a) The old palace of the Sultan in central Ahmedabad called the Bhadra is today in ruins. Some half-timbering survives but no wood carvings.
- (b) Of the two Mughal palaces, the most important one was built by Shah Jahan in the Shahi Bagh. The second palace is situated next to the Bhadra. Both these buildings are in brick. Another important structure, used today as the General Post Office, is also of brick.
- (c) The numerous smaller palaces the

residence, for example at Sarkhej, are in stone.

- (d) The only significant Muslim residence in wood which we could locate, after intense searching, was that of the Kazi family in Astodia.

Maratha rule in Ahmedabad left a building known locally as the 'Gaekwad Haveli' but nothing remains of this except one structure in a semi-colonial style, probably built by the British.

Among European historical buildings, there still stands part of a structure which was once the Dutch Factory near the Teen Darwaza. It is today called the Ballantyne Building, and has fragmentary woodwork.

The majority of the wooden houses which are noteworthy belong to Hindu and Jain families, and these are located centrally. Muslim neighbourhoods are to the north and south, but they are of poor quality. Much Ahmedabad has been subjected to modern renovation so that large areas are bare of old buildings; yet, there still survives whole streets of wooden houses with their ancient gateways, forming a maze of *cul-de-sacs* of a very picturesque character. As regards the woodwork, the speciality of Ahmedabad is:

- (a) Massive doors reaching from floor level to the ceiling, with elaborately carved lintels and *tollas*.
- (b) Finely carved wooden frontages incised with a minutely executed floral pattern found only in Ahmedabad and resembling block printing.
- (c) Balconies carved with a very curious motif: a mythical creature, semi-human or animal and sprouting plants.
- (d) Figures of armed retainers wearing Rajasthani or Maratha costume, appearing on balcony uprights.



Fig.186. The armed warrior with a shield and dagger embraces a female at the waist.



Fig.187. The beam-end is masked by skillfully carved winged figure. Animals are also part of the composition (top right).



Fig.188. Another winged figure having *sitar* in his hands. Cows are also seen near lotus pedestal masking the beam-end (bottom right).



(e) Birds, especially the peacock and parrot, appearing frequently in the carving.

(f) The use of a black oil called beltel for coating of woodwork.

### Examples

#### House of Mohanlal Maganlal Jhaveri, Doshivadani Pol

This old historical building no longer

stands on its original site. It has been acquired by the Government of Gujarat with the intention of setting it up again in the new capital of Gandhinagar. Our study of it was done before its removal.

The house was constructed by the famous Harkor Sethani, wife of the famous Hutheesing who, in 1848, built the large Jain temple in Ahmedabad. This family was well known and influential for its commercial activities and its

wealth. We thus have a rare example of an established date for a particular family, and may safely assume that this building was built about that date. Harkor Sethani built another residence in Fatasha Pol which is also illustrated.

The ground floor consists of a narrow verandah or *otlo* with its free-standing columns resting in stone bases. These columns carry

struts and capitals which support beams and the superstructure. One can see the rear wall of the verandah with attached columns embedded in the masonry, and horizontal bonding timbers which tie up with the frames of doors and windows. Details of the struts and woodwork are described further on.

The first floor is made up of two divisions which are clearly demarcated. The lower portion has a frieze of elephant heads,

and above it the curvilinear balcony slightly inclines outwards. The upper portion, quite distinct from the lower, consists of the carved, panelled wooden frontage with supporting columns and struts, and in between tall windows. These two divisions belong to two different traditions as explained earlier.

The second floor, just visible; has tapering columns with a metal balustrade of colonial design which was probably added much later.



Fig.189. An ascetic on the top of a strut.

Figs. 75, 76, 77, shows a close-up of the strut of the verandah and some of the structural parts. The strut has a very complex carving spread evenly over the whole rounded surface. There is a mesh of plants with stylised birds enclosed within tendrils; the birds are carved in a manner which almost suggests plants, so that birds and plants form a very homogenous pattern of great beauty and refinement. This particular design is not



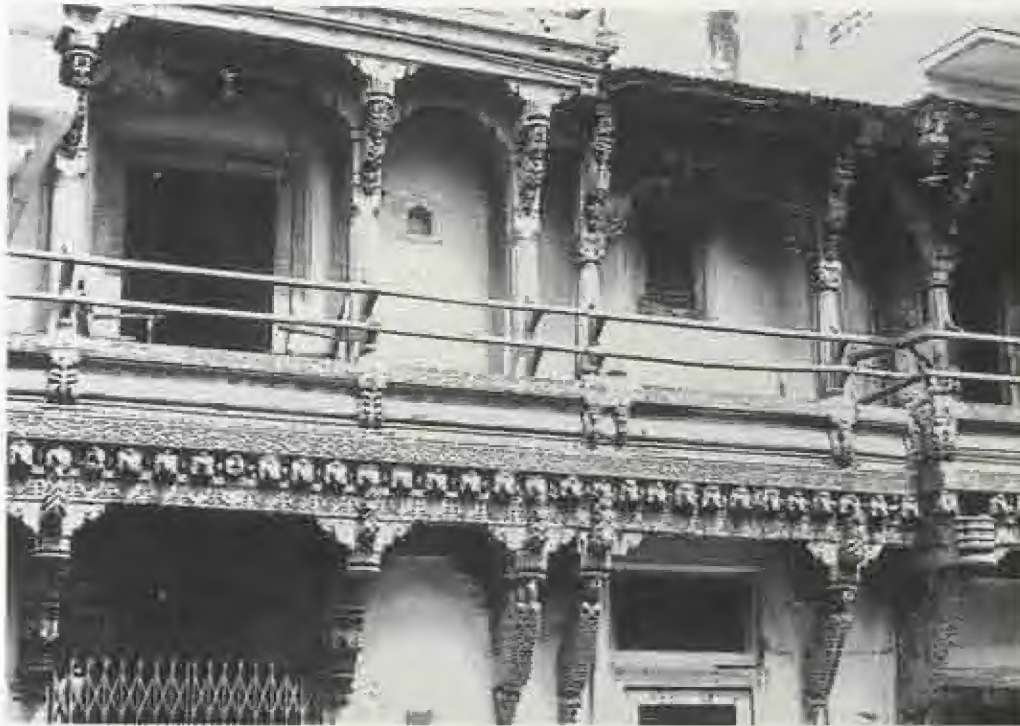


Fig.190. A general view of the building. The open balcony is very common in Baroda region.

common in Gujarat. The strut against the square face of the column which has a design almost identical with that in the Vohra house in Kapadvanj (Fig. 70), except that the lower point of junction has three birds with tails similar to

those seen at Patan (Fig. 47). Another single bird is higher up. These birds are cut out of the once planed face of the column in a manner unusual in Gujarati woodwork. The depth of incision makes them very fragile to handle during



Fig.191. A closer view of finely executed composite beast design with an elephant head. The wings are delicately indicated by shallow relief.





Fig. 192. A strut shows very finely executed composite beast design with an elephant head. The wings are delicately indicated by shallow relief.

construction and yet similar birds appear frequently in Ahmedabad. It shows with what care construction must have proceeded, and also how carving was emancipating itself from the rules of carpentry. The capital of the column also has, typical of Ahmedabad, a circlet of beading and birds. The bracket-capital has further birds on the extended arm plus the characteristic ribbed disc. In its centre is a recessing of planes to form a bhadrā and the square has a potted plant with finely curling vines. It can be seen how frequently birds appear in the carvings of Ahmedabad. The whole style of carving represents a period when urban security had become so well established that wealth could be displayed without fear in richness of woodwork. The style is as yet

unspoilt by eclectic admixtures: the motifs it adopts all belong to a common, homogenous tradition.

Note how the main, heavy beams are left uncarved. The carved beam visible at left above is a light one: it has carvings even on the underside. Above it can be seen part of the frieze of elephant-heads, as also the elephant-head shaped cap to the beam-end over the bracket-capital.

Figs. 78, 79, 80, 81 are views and details of the entrance door. The design of the shutters is typical of the more elaborate and massive door (the lighter variant we saw in Kapadvanj, Fig. 67): it is made up of planks with a heavy overlay of ledges and battens rivetted onto them. The studs of the rivets can be seen in the centres of the carved panels of the ledges and battens;

Fig. 193. A view of strut with floral pattern.





Fig.195. A balustrade figure with birds on either side.



Fig.194. One of the figural struts of divine musicians.



Fig.196. A front elevation with carvings on balustrade, the fascia board and struts of ground and first floor.



there are additional rivets in between, plus metal straps. The manner in which the ledges and battens are carved into alternating squares and set-backs is found all over North and South Gujarat. What is novel are the twin birds appearing at the top of the shutters – this feature appears only in Ahmedabad. It is not clear whether they are affixed onto the planks, or form integral parts of the top ledge. Here we again find a kind of carving which has broken away from carpentry and becomes 3-dimensional.

The remaining details of the lintels and *tollas* are so identical with those seen in the Kapadvanj door (see Figs. 67, 68, 69) that no further description is required except to note that the floral pattern here has a meander without beginning or end, whereas the design had a starting point, and is more compressed, the present design is definitely more indigenous, the former betrays some foreign influence, possibly Islamic. The continuous floral meander is characteristic of woodwork in which linear forms and linear patterns emerge. The floral design with a starting point, for example a potted plant, requires more surface for its spread and is more suited to a wall mural. The specific articulation of the meander seen here, with almost circular spirals ending in buds within, appears mainly in Ahmedabad.

Figs. 82, 83 show parts of the balcony balustrade. The motif is characteristic of Ahmedabad, namely a mythical creature spouting plants. In one case we have a stylised bird with foliage held in its beak; in another it is a rampant elephant with foliage spouting from its mouth; in a third it is an elephant with rider and goad, holding foliage in its trunk. Now, this association of plant and animal is not to be confused with the one described earlier in which a man holds a vine. That motif has a relationship to Buddhist and Gupta art in which the creature is a mythical *Yaksha*. Here we have something different. It is well known that in

Indian art the ocean is conceived as the treasure house of gifts. It was by churning the ocean that the gods produced miraculous things, including the drink of immortality (amrita). The symbol of the ocean in art was a makara, a mythical creature often depicted with a snout or trunk. Elephants also symbolised rain-bringing clouds. It therefore seems that the creatures shown on these balconies go back to that concept of the ocean of waters producing desirable objects symbolised by plants, and the elephant here is a variation on the makara. The motif thus simply symbolises 'plenty'. The presence of the stylised bird in this role is less clear.

Note how the uprights have floral designs as opposed to the human figures usually seen. The rings on them were meant for fastening canvas awnings.

#### House of Vasa family, Totlajini Pol

This is among the most richly carved houses in Ahmedabad and fortunately still well maintained. The fact that it has some peculiar features indicates that it is later than the one above.

Fig. 84 shows part of the main elevation (the whole cannot be photographed satisfactorily on account of the narrowness of the lane). This is an example of a painted wooden front. The elements of the architecture are now well known: at the bottom is the frieze of elephant heads, then the curvilinear balustrade with uprights and above it the panelled wooden frontage with supporting columns carrying struts and long windows. The top floor has tapering columns and metal balustrade was added afterwards. The turned bars of the railing to the windows prove that these are later additions, as are also the two horizontal bars above them. The carvings on the columns have many eclectic motifs which do not match together, giving further proof of a late over-decorated style.

Figs. 85, 86 are two views of the ground





Fig.197. A close-up of the balustrade. This scene portrays a central figure of a four-armed moustachioed male holding a spear and a stylised drum. He is seated upon a tiger.



Fig.198. A close-up of balustrade of Krishna holding double-headed stick, flanked by females with fly-whisks and cows on either side.



Fig.199. A panel on balustrade shows Vishnu in his incarnation as Narasimha ripping open the demon Hiranyakashipu.





Fig.200. The female goddess Durga standing on the corpse of Shiva, holding in one of its four arms a severed head and in another a sword.

Fig.201. A four-armed goddess Lakshmi attended by twin elephants.



Fig.202. Goddess Durga riding on her vehicle, the lion, bearing aloft a weapon including a sword.



floor columns. Note the part of the shaft which has flat faces: it can be seen how the face adjacent to the abutting strut is divided into two portions each with cusped profiles, linked together in the middle. The strut has a depression along its lateral surface which matches this link and its own abutting surface also has rounded profiles to match the column surface. In this case the column profiles are left plain (in the previous example, as also in Kapadvanj, they were minutely

carved) so that one can see the original form more clearly. The strut has a variant foliage design resembling creepers and a bud.

Figs. 87, 88, 89 show the carvings on the balustrade: these consist of human figures on the uprights, standing upon potted plants, and on either side the motif of a mythical creature spouting plants. There are altogether four upright figures, of which three are illustrated. They all hold musical instrument, and their stiff postures



and swirling costumes are meant to indicate that they are divine figures. Two of the figures, one playing a flute, the other a sitar, have a parrot perched on the shoulder. The profusion of birds which appear on Ahmedabad carvings has already been noticed above: here we have a new combination which is also very common in this city. Twin parrots also cling to the pots from which the plants emerge, supporting the figures. The manner in which these figures stand upon the plants is very unconvincing and indicates a degeneration of style. The earlier, simple lotus pedestal was a better design.

The adjoining spouted-plant motif appears only in two versions which are repeated in pairs on the curvilinear portion of the balustrade – one version has the composite beast: partly elephant and partly bird with wings, while the feet are turned into claws. The plant undulates from its mouth. In the other version is a *kinnara*, a half human, half horse centaur; in this case the human portion is more emphasized with legs shown in abstraction and bent to denote flying. The figure holds a trumpet in one hand and the plant in the other. In all the examples, the end of the plant terminates in a bird. It will be recalled that in the example seen earlier (Figs. 82, 83) the plant was more realistic: here it becomes less so and the addition of the bird shows how a simple motif was rendered needlessly complicated under the pressure of a kind of rivalry among house-owners to display extravagance. This is best exemplified by the carving (Fig. 89) in the centre of the balustrade at the right (located over the carriage-way into the inner courtyard). Here the plants emanate from the feet of a bird and terminate in elephant headed lions dangling awkwardly from the foliage, the design is grotesque; yet the skill in the execution has to be admired. It is simply a kind of baroque stage in wood carvings.

There are views of the wooden frontage. There are three motifs of design,

contradictory to each other, on the columns. The lower portion has a stylised cypress emerging from a pot with parrots clinging to the edges; above the cypress are the struts depicting composite beasts with raised trunks and small human figures crouching between the feet; above them, where there would normally be a fanciful beam-end of a recognisable variety (see earlier examples), we now have scaly birds of an ugly design. The attempt at novelty has failed.

Figs. 90, 91 show close-ups of the remarkable figural struts of the top floor. These are no longer parts of architecture but of sculpture: they are fully rounded and three-dimensional in form, with hollows reaching through, and garland-like appendages draping over the feet. The figures are winged, but as the wings have merely been stuck, many have fallen. All wear fantastic head-gear, are richly jewelled and costumed, the faces rounded in typical Gujarati style, with caste marks. Most carry musical instruments; i.e. are divine *apsaras* and *vidyadharas*, but one holds a pair of sticks used in the *dandiya ras* of Gujarat. The manner in which the figures curve upwards, matching the sweep of the strut, is very well done. These carvings are among the finest in this category.

### Carvings of the rear elevation

This building is unusual in that it has a richly carved rear elevation opening onto an inner court shared by other houses. The main entrance door, once facing the lane, has been shifted to this rear portion.

Figs. 92, 93 show part of the rear elevation; the balustrade is now not curvilinear but flat and carvings correspond to the change in surface. The floral meander is in coils similar to that seen in the Jhaveri house lintel, but has a beginning from a pot in the centre of the composition, and is terminated by parrots holding the ends in their beaks. One can see, again, the decorative development of a theme









Fig. 204. A strut showing a rider on a galloping horse is bent forward close to the mane as befits experienced horsemanship.

into greater complexity. The up-rights match the change in character: they no longer have figures but potted plants entwined with birds. In between them, at the centre, is the figure of a kneeling armed retainer with dagger and shield in possibly Rajasthani costume. This is a purely secular figure. Note the two parrots on the shoulders.

Below the above central figure is a very curious composition. It is the junction of twin column with twin bracket-capitals, formed into elephant-heads facing the camera; above them are three peacocks with flaring tails, flanked by decorative profiles nailed to the beam. In

Fig. 203. A strut with too many unrelated themes put together. Krishna is the central motif. Higher up is seated an ascetic with a rosary in one hand (facing page).



Fig. 205. A very different kind of figural strut. The limbs of the figure are rounded and flowing with protruding wings.

between all this medley a tiny figure is squeezed show identity which was at first not discernible. It was then discovered that it represented a yogi or ascetic seated within a hut holding a chin-stick for his head to rest upon.

Between the twin columns of the panelled front—carved into stylised cypresses—is the figure of mythical being holding the stalk of a rising vine. Stalk-bearing figures already appeared in Kapadvanj on struts (see Figs. 57 to 62); here the motif appears on a flat surface. We shall see finer variants later on.

#### House of Yogesh Shah, Haribhaktini Pol

This richly carved house belongs to the same series as shown above, but is remarkable



for having preserved traditional details without excessive eclectic admixtures, for great skill in execution, and because the coating of black beltel reveals the original carvings in greater clarity. However, those carvings which are identical with earlier ones are now shown, but merely noted.

Fig. 94 is a view of the front twin columns, with a carved panel set in between. The upper faces of the columns are identical with the Jhaveri building; it is at the point where the circular form begins that new details appear. It will be noticed that the shaft flutings branch out into floral abstractions, and superimposed above them are inverted petals with a central bud. The quantum of carving is more than in the Jhaveri building by additions to the original design. By way of comparison, twin columns which form the interior courtyard are also shown (Fig. 95). We can now see the whole development of design. The courtyard columns have bare faces just above the rounded shaft but retain the traditional profiles seen here in great clarity. It is as if two halves were knotted together in the centre by a ring, which is repeated again at the bottom. It is out of the hollows at the corners that later stylised birds emerge - as the verandah column faces reveal. Note also how the top of the rounded part of the shaft has only the petal-and-bud motif without complications and that in this simplified version the flutings join the petals in a far more elegant and convincing fashion. The capitals are also simpler, being devoid of all those beads and birds, having a very effective floral device. One can virtually follow, visually, how a simple design gradually takes on complexities and becomes over-decorated.

Figs. 96, 97 are close up of the area above the capitals: the design has become ornate and over-decorated, with great flaring beam-ends similar to the examples from Kapadvanj (Fig. 51), and elephant-heads with pecking birds perched atop. Squeezed in between the mass

of details is a trio of human figures: a central flute-player (Krishna) flanked by females bearing fly-whisks; and just below them a trumpet player flanked by peacocks.

They show various views of the upper panelled frontage and the balustrade. All surfaces of the panelling are now covered with a minutely incised floral pattern of great beauty. The pattern is based upon circular meanders with each circle enclosing a flower, the whole a continuous flow without beginning or end. The overall effect is rich but not over-decorated because the motifs are few and repetitive. This is the kind of minute work which originated in block printing patterns and is typical of Ahmedabad. The part of the panelling between the twin columns (Fig. 97) has human figure holding the stalk of a rising vine spiralling upwards. The figure has two parrots at shoulder level. The floral pattern now changes: it becomes undulating (not circular) with small circlets forming the terminations. It is very interesting to find that the floral treatment changes simply due to one change in this case, namely that, there is a distinct 'beginning'. The intention here is to depict a real plant, whereas in the other case it is a floral abstraction.

The twin columns are carved with a *melange* of motifs, all small in scale and hence not clashing too violently with each other. There is the stylised cypress rising from a vase, with birds entwined among the foliage, and small figures ending the design at the top (one is a seated human figure).

Turning to the balustrades, we find the motif of plant-spouting animals in different versions. The elephant-like composite beast holds a plant which terminates in a large parrot; in the other case tendrils emanate in the beak of one parrot and end at another. The central device also has parrots and a potted plant.

The above illustrations will show that the whole arrangement of parts and of motifs had



become standardised into a local style of great homogeneity, and all that could be done in order to achieve greater richness or diversity was to keep on adding the same motifs in new locations, or to add frills to existing ones. As a style, it had reached a climax.

### House of Sushila Shah (Kalsawala), Sankdi Sheri

The first floor wooden frontage of this house is one of the most richly carved in Ahmedabad, with some new features not seen so far. The house once belonged to the well known Divetia family, whose ancestral house is just across the road. The Divetia family, in the past, were occupied in administration and some of them held very senior positions in the feudal states of Saurashtra.

The novel feature, seen in Fig. 98, is that there is no running balcony along the front of the first floor. Instead, the wood panelling commences from floor level. This means that the carvings of the front which were, in the above examples, in two separate portions with separate themes, now become unified into a single pattern. On the other hand, there are long windows reaching down to floor level, each with its own small balcony distinct from the next. These individual balconies provide an opportunity for a different kind of design, namely for figural uprights and a pierced grill as balustrade. This pierced grill is very similar to those of the Palanpur palace. The manner of construction is better seen here : small fretted strips of wood are morticed and nailed to each other diagonally, each strip having a serrated edge, producing a more varied pattern.

Fig. 99 shows two windows with the column in between. It will be noticed that the minute carving of the surface is of the standard Ahmedabad type, but that now it also covers the window frames which are etched out sharply (the two railing bars are recent additions). The floral patterns are variations of



Fig. 206. The spacious and open character of this hall shows each row of elegantly carved column, joined to beams which are tied to attached columns in the wall.

those seen earlier : one pattern emerges from a vase (Fig. 100), another is continuous. The column has become a mass of superimposed details unrelated to each other, producing a confusing effect. Birds are again prominent. Figs. 101, 102 are close ups.

Figs. 103-104 are of the different figural uprights : they are so arranged that for each balcony there is one male and one female, a total of 12 as follows.

1st Figure : male, in a dhoti, with hands held in a pose which is not identifiable.

2nd Figure : female, one hand holding an unclear object, the other a *kamandalu* (a water pot used by ascetics), wearing a skirt.

3rd Figure : *apsara* or heavenly musician



wearing a skirt.

4th Figure : male, wearing *dhoti*, with a Maratha or Rajasthani head-dress, a caste mark on the forehead, holding a parrot in one hand, the other is unclear.

5th Figure : female holding fly-whisk.

6th Figure : male, with a u-shaped caste mark, holding a musical instrument.

7th Figure : Krishna playing the flute.

8th Figure : female, holding a fan.

9th Figure : female, with hands in a pose.

10th Figure : male in a dancing pose.

11th Figure : female holding a drum.

12th Figure : female holding a flower (?).

The above figures share some common characteristics. All the females wear blouses and thin clinging skirts (but not the thick plaited skirts of Gujarati peasant women); all the males have *dhotis*, only one has a turban. The proportions of the figures are good, with heads slightly tilted to one side and legs crossed. These postures resemble dance poses, but it could also mean that they are heavenly creatures—their lotus pedestals indicate this.

### Houses in Jada Bhagatni Pol

This *khadki* is remarkable in having preserved its original architectural character. The houses display a great degree of uniformity in design not found in other *khadkis*. This particular *khadki* was founded by migrant Patels from Mehsana who still reside there.

Fig. 105 shows a street view of the houses. They were all originally two-storeyed; the third floors are later additions.

Figs. 106, 107, 108 are views of the house of Gautam Patel. We find here the combination of balcony plus panelled front, but now the balustrade is flat. Its floral pattern commences from a thick central stem and undulates in both directions (unfortunately, the

thick coats of paint have destroyed the clarity of the carving). The uprights have plants rising from a pot, with a small dancing figure atop.

Figs. 109 is a close-up of the wooden panelling: the treatment of the surface develops further upon the design we saw in Sushila Shah's house. There the frame around the window was emphasised in a single frame: here it is as if there were three broad bands around the windows, all richly carved. These carvings are also carried over onto the shutters of the window – something rare in Gujarat. The only example found was in Doshivad, Patan. The style of carving is clearly different from those seen earlier: here the empty spaces between the foliage are greater, almost equalling the carved portions, and the resulting pattern is not so pleasing.

Fig. 109 is a close-up of the small figures placed between the elephant-heads of the frieze. Similar figures appear in many houses around Baroda, but are not common in Ahmedabad. They are an eclectic variety borrowing motifs from different sources – many are birds. The actions of the human figures are not always clear. The figure holding a pestle and grinding in a mortar is illustrated again further on in a larger version.

Fig. 110 is a view of the panelled frontage of the house of Jasuben Patel adjoining the house above. The rosettes of the panelling are very finely executed producing a rich contrast of light and shade, and the contrast between a broader band of carving and a narrower strip (with a floral meander) is very effective. On the uprights are carved figures of a secular character. One is an armed retainer holding a staff; he wears Rajasthani costume, and has the kind of moustache often found on Rajput warriors of the period. Note the bird on his

Fig. 207. Close-up of a strut. It first supports the extended arm of the bracket-capital. The delicately carved floral patterns are finest in Gujarat (facing page).







shoulder. To either side are carved motifs of the balustrade : a human figure with bent legs (indicating flying) holds the stalk of a plant which terminates in large fruit-like appendages. Another armed retainer holds a musket—which at once indicates the lateness of the carving, probably late 19th century A. D. when British control was complete.

#### **Tankshal Building, Haja Patelni Pol**

This building is so named after the owners who received the title of 'Tankshal' which means 'Mint'. They state that the mint was once located in their building during British rule, hence the title. Today the building is rented out to a school and the interior has been completely renovated. However, the exterior is in original condition and is illustrated on account of the excellence and clarity of the carvings and due to some curiosities. Only the balustrade carvings are shown.

Fig. 111 is a view of part of the balustrade; Fig. 112 shows close-up of the carvings. The corner carving has the plant motif but without any figure holding it (as the earlier ones had), nor any admixture of birds. The design is plain and very impressive : stalks emerge from one stylised bud, come together at a second, from which emerges a spray of foliage.

#### **House of Divetia Family, Sankdi Sheri**

This family has already been mentioned in connection with Sushila Shah's house illustrated earlier. The present house is the one they retained as their residence and it is a great mansion both in size and quality. However, carvings are few; those of the front elevation are so heavily coated with paint as to render them blurred ; hence it is those of the internal courtyard which are shown, plus the entrance door.

Fig. 113 is close-up of the carvings on the balustrades of the upper floor around the inner courtyard. The manner in which the carved portions are sparsely distributed, with large

blank contrasting surfaces, is very impressive. It will be noticed that the floral design is somewhat similar to that of the Tankshal building shown earlier. Foliage terminates in fruit-like appendages, or ends in sprays. The carved face of the light beam and the carvings of the balustrade match each other very well, producing a harmonious blending of designs.

#### **Miscellaneous Carvings from Ahmedabad.**

##### **House in Hanuman Sheri :**

Fig. 114 shows the carving is of an ascetic with knotted hair, grinding *bhang* in a pastel (*bhang* is an intoxicating beverage drunk by some religious sects.) This figure may be compared with a similar one in Vasa House. The appearance of such curious figures on domestic houses reveals to what extent a kind of playful innovation had begun to influence wood carving.

##### **Swaminarayan Temple**

This temple has the largest structure in wood in Gujarat; it is also full of wood carvings; but unfortunately the quality of the carvings is not of the high standard seen so far. That is why it is, except for one general view, not being illustrated. This general view ( Fig. 115, 116 ) will show the kind of visual impact which is created by a mass assemblage of carved wood: it is overwhelming. The temple was built in 1850 A. D.

##### **Nadiad**

This is an old town, but today, except for one part, it has very little significant architecture. This one part is occupied by the numerous descendants of the well known Desai family ( actually they are Patels but use this title) who were once very influential revenue-farmers in the district. The wealth earned through revenue - farming was used to largely demolish the older structures and replace them with great mansions built during British rule in an opulent





Fig.208. A double lintel with ornate, eclectic, over-decorated carving with mixed motif.

colonial style. These colonial buildings, dating from about 1850 onward, are not described. Some older woodwork, however, survives in fragments and these are shown. The carvings are of an extraordinarily high quality.

With Nadiad, and further south, an interesting change occurs in the carvings: we begin to find many more large figural struts with human figures on them. In fact, the human figure (or its divine counterpart) now really becomes a prominent element of wood carving. This striking change calls for an explanation. It seems to us that the reason is the following. Ahmedabad had, as its main locus of wood carving – the panelled first floor frontage which provided a large area of decoration. This large, flat area fully carved so dominated the composition that all other parts were subordinated to it. In towns further to the south, the panelled front is absent and the main areas

of display are balustrades and struts and it is these which receive innovative treatment, i. e. have more figural work.

#### House of Bachubhai Desai, Desai Vago

Figs. 117, 118 are views of an entrance door to the *kacheri* or administrative building. The lintel is carved in a style which is even more eclectic and hybrid than what we have seen so far. The corner *tollas* are grotesque: at the top is a realistic elephant head and shoulders surmounting two stylised elephant heads one over the other. Triple *tollas* are not required: they are mere decorative devices; the two kinds of design do not match each other and the upper *tolla* is quite unstructural in form. But the lintel proper has a very beautifully composed floral design in which the foliage commences from the bottom and, in its upward movement, the stems cross each other in a manner not seen









Fig. 210. Frontal view of a strut with greater mixture of motifs. At the top is a mace-wielding Hanuman, just below the gaping jaws of a mythical beast spouting foliage and at the bottom, Garuda.

elsewhere. This technique and design bear a faint resemblance to the famous stone screen of the Sidi Sayyed Mosque at Ahmedabad of a much earlier date. The design is obviously conceived for a large, flat area, i. e. a conception better suited to stone than wood. In its centre is a small canopied shrine enclosing of Ganesha flanked by two females with oddly twisted bodies; above them are incongruously placed peacocks and a cow. Such a *melange* of motifs thrown haphazardly together is a sign of deterioration in design, and it is certain that this

Fig. 209. A strut shows the composite beast, partly elephant, partly lion and partly bird. The carving has numerous moulded surfaces and deep hollows (facing page).

lintel is of a much later date than the figural struts which follow.

Figs. 119, 120 show an adjoining courtyard which has a series of figural struts and other carved members which are unique: the style and other details seem to belong to an archaic era beyond anything seen so far. It is difficult to say whether these figural struts in fact represent a very ancient style of carving or whether they are merely innovative, but I think the former conclusion is more valid. The struts are about three feet in length and each is carved for its whole length into a single, slightly curved figure almost in the round. The posture is stiff and archaic, lacking all those nuances commonly found in later work, such as crossed

Fig. 211. Close-up of lower part of the strut shown in fig. 210. A moustachioed Garuda seated on a lotus pedestal with two wings on either side.





or bent legs, bent head, greater movement of arms, etc. instead, we find completely round faces with staring eyes elongated as in miniature painting, heads joined to bodies without necks, square shoulders, and arms held unnaturally close to the bodies. Such a stiff posture clearly arose from the spatial restriction imposed by attempting to introduce a full-size figure into a narrow structural member such as the strut. It is a logical adaptation to the material (we shall see later, in Baroda, how this restriction was broken). In other words, the carving here is born from a wooden tradition and we are justified in considering it part of an original, archaic tradition. The costumes are evidence of the same fact: all the figures are female, and they wear the typical peasant skirt or *ghagra* and blouse: a scarf or *odhni* encircling the arms billows out to the rear and fills out the otherwise empty space between the figure and the column. One may compare these figural struts with those in the Vasa residence (Figs. 90, 91) to see the enormous difference in style.

Above each strut is a plaque containing further small figures, the plaque masks a beam end. Apart from the above struts, there are two others of a different kind (shown below) which appear to have been picked up from some other building and reused.

The sequence: ( starting from the west side )

Figs. 119, 120 show two struts which are of the mythical composite beast variety, with additional figures at the base, reminiscent again of Kapadvanj. They are in the florid, rather degenerate style and one can see at a glance that they are executed by different craftsmen. The trio of females with linked arms (at the base) obviously represent folk dancers; the female with bent legs and scalloped skirt is a flying divinity.

#### House of Girish Ambalal Desai, Desai Vago

This small house has some of the finest



Fig. 212. It is a novel design of a strut. An armed retainer with a sword and shield wearing a Rajasthani head-dress.

carving seen in Gujarat. The work is late of a and has absorbed numerous motifs from different sources, but they are combined together very harmoniously and executed to perfection. Many motifs appear for the first and only time and it is a pity that more information about the owner could not be gathered.

Fig. 121 is a view of the elevation. The lateness of the building can be seen from the use of arched openings to the doors behind the balconies, and from their panelled shutters. One can see here how the figural motif dominates the design: large figures appear on the bases of the tapering columns of the first floor, as also on the struts above them. Of these, the two adjoining the central balcony are retainers holding ceremonial staffs—one may compare



them with those from Ahmedabad and Kapadvanj (Figs. 105, 106, 107, 108). The posture is almost classical, with tilted head, crossed legs, and movement in the body. The face is broad and moustachioed, the costume probably Maratha. The end figures are females — as if in dance — holding fly-whisks. They wear saris which indicate Maratha influence. These figures are clearly secular (Fig. 122 )

The introduction of religious motifs in wood carving has been discussed earlier and it is significant that the religious motif appears as an accompaniment to the more dominant position of figural work as a general phenomenon. In other words, it is a dual phenomenon : the dominance of figural work is accompanied by the emergence of religious motifs ; both appear in the same region — south of Ahmedabad.

Some other features of the elevation are the following. The whole surface of the tapering columns, the panels of the door shutters, the door jambs, the surface of the balustrades, are all covered with minutely incised carving. No other house in Gujarat has this kind of treatment. It is, of course, overdone, but is saved by the uniformity of patterns used.

Fig. 123 shows the most remarkable part of the carvings which is on the frieze below the balconies. The frieze is in two parts : a horizontal band with the usual elephant heads but in between are a series of small figures of great elegance and variety. The human figures are placed diagonally so as to use the space more economically, and the bodies are made to kneel with the legs in dance-like postures in order to fit them in. In one there is a hanuman (monkey god associated with the Rama legend) in a flying posture; others have animals.

The fascia board above the row of elephant-heads is curvilinear and on this small curvature are carved four groups of animated figures strongly resembling Balinese dancers,

(Fig. 124 ). They are located just below the larger figures on the column bases. In one scene (Fig. 125 ) there is a four-armed deity grappling with two apparent demons holding swords; the deity has them by their top-knots. The deity is very likely Vishnu, destroying the demons Madhu and Kaitabha. Note the dance-like postures of this and all other groups. The Vaishnava theme is repeated in the next scene (Fig. 126) : a central male figure is flanked by two females, all holding sticks in their hands. They depict the well-known *dandia ras* or stick-dance common in Saurashtra, and forming part of the Krishna legend. The third is again a dance scene (Fig. 127), while the fourth (Fig. 124) is not identifiable. Note the ornate background carving of the whole fascia board against which these groups stand out.

### Vaso

Vaso is a large, prosperous village about 20 kms from Nadiad. It is dominated by Patels. From among them one family arose to great prominence during the Maratha rule; their members took to revenue-farming and accumulated great wealth, but later split into two branches. One of these branches produced the famous Darbar Gopaldas. The descendants of the two branches have taken the surnames 'Desai' and 'Amin' and both built, at the same time, magnificent residences adjoining each other in the years 1872 - 76 A. D. There was a kind of rivalry between the two families to construct the finer building, but both are equally fine. One of them, that belonging to Mr. Anand Prasad Amin, has been declared a Protected Monument by the Archaeological Survey of India but due to some dispute it remains locked up at the time of writing. However, the author was able to work on this building before that occurrence.

These two residences are large, spacious, multi-storeyed mansions with rich carvings on various floors, and it can be



Fig.213: A close-up of column-capital and bracket where capital shows a miniature battle-scene between men and demons.



unequivocally stated that they have by far the finest carvings in Gujarat. Apart from a great deal of figural work, they also have numerous religious motifs incorporated in the decoration, mainly belonging to the Vaishnava tradition. Although the date of the building is very late,

yet the designs show a relative purity of style undisturbed by eclectic admixtures. It is interesting to find that so much woodwork was being employed as late as 1872 and that the craftsmen who were able to execute such fine work still existed.



Fig.214: A composite beast is excellently carved on minute scale. A beautifully carved bracket-capital is also seen.



### Residence of Anand Parasad Amin, Vaso.

Fig. 128 shows different views of the elevations. The rear view illustrates the overwhelming quantity of wood which was being employed in the construction. The elevation in Fig. 128 is from the east, which is now the present entrance, but the original entrance was from the north. The verandah to the right is a later addition. Note the figural struts to the columns of the ground floor.

There are figural struts, and their placement on the column can be seen in Fig. 129. These figures have some similarity to those of Nadiad ( Fig. 225 ) but are more cramped; they not only have part of the costume billowing out at the rear, but also have stylised wings emerging from the shoulders. The faces are broad, the costumes archaic.

Sequence of figures ( from the left )

Fig. 130 is a female holding a *tambura* or small drum.

Fig. 131. This last of the series is a male and female pair in an amorous embrace known as *mithuna* in Indian art. The male figure clasps both breasts with his hands, and has one leg entwined across one of hers. It will be apparent that the amorous posture depicted here bears no resemblance to the *mithunas* seen in temples ; they both share the concept *mithuna* but completely differ in its portrayal. This difference emphasizes clearly that wood carving owes little to stone carving : *mithunas* in stone were in profusion all around but they were not copied when it came to executing one in wood. It is as if the domains of secular and religious temple art were felt to be quite distinct and had to be treated quite differently. While the concepts of the latter may be adopted by the former, the figures themselves differed in proportions, costumes and postures.

The subject of erotic art has already been touched upon earlier where its ritual magical function was discussed. Here we find the erotic

motif leaving its secluded location and exhibiting itself openly. The present *mithuna* is in a prominent part of the elevation ; it is of a large size, and is quite explicit in its meaning, i.e. it is meant to be seen. However, it remains only one among a series which is non-erotic, and this fact would appear to explain its purpose. The *mithuna* has undergone a change of function: from being a magical device it has become reduced to a mere decorative motif, i.e. it has become trivialised and conventionalised. The figural series on a house front must have a variety of motifs in order to satisfy the decorative demand, such as the girl putting on the *ghungru* or holding a musical instrument, and the *mithuna* merely becomes one more such acceptable motif. Nevertheless, it does represent something revolutionary because the erotic depiction has never been part of the domestic culture in Gujarat. Erotic art basically belongs to feudal society ; Gujarati culture has always been mercantile and the erotic depiction has consistently been subdued and restricted to spheres other than the domestic. How is one to explain its acceptance as a ' harmless ' decorative motif ?

If one goes by the popularity of the motif, it can be observed that it is the Baroda region which displays it in greatest intensity; this is also the region which was subjected to maximum Maratha influence. Therefore, it seems logical to assume that erotic motifs came in more prominently during this period. The examples from Baroda will substantiate this conclusion.

### Carved Plaques

All around the central courtyard there are a number of small decorative plaques placed on either side of the doors and windows, and some of these are illustrated:

Fig. 132 is of a four-armed deity with a female seated on one thigh ( this manner of depicting a divine couple is very common in folk art ). The male figure has a top-knot and holds





Fig.215. A potted plant in the centre gives flowers and leaves upright with two birds sitting near the pot.

Fig.216. Another panel with a potted plant giving a form like creeper.

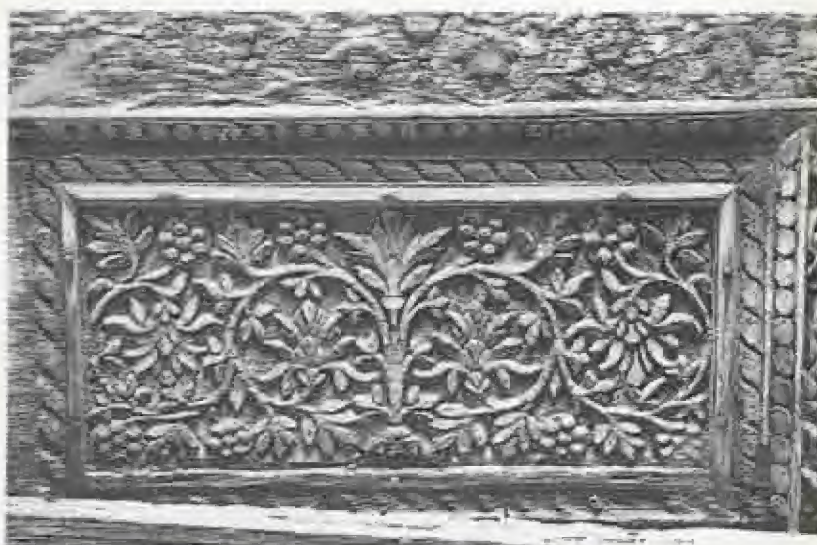


Fig.217. A creeper like carving.



a trident and drum in his hands, indicating that this is Shiva and Parvati. Now, the portrayal of Shiva is forbidden in the house according to shastric texts, because he represents dangerous forces : his depiction here flying female figures below are mere embellishments. Fig.133 shows a composition which is wholly eclectic : a stylised peacock beneath a recessed roof ; over this is a curvilinear arrangement

borrowed from temple architecture (similar struts appear, for example, at Mount Abu temples; and a branching plant with birds. The desire for richness has overwhelmed good design.

Fig. 134 represents a multi armed goddess holding weapons (maces) and is obviously Durga, the goddess of war - another anomaly in a domestic house.



### Miscellaneous Carvings

Fig. 135. This carved bonding timber has, again, the goddess Lakshmi within a shrine, flanked by elephants crudely made. One is inescapably reminded of folk art.

Fig. 136 shows two scenes of carvings, from among many, below the window sills located between the brackets. The first is depicting a woman churning a milk-pot, a male standing beside, with a tiny creature clasping the milk-pot not clearly identifiable. It could be part of the Krishna legend where the boy Krishna steals butter from his mother. The second has three standing figures: two holding bows in their hands while the third, a female, holds a fly-whisk. They can only be Rama, his brother Lakshman, and Sita wandering in exile. All the figures are between brackets shaped as stylised elephant-heads. A Ganesha is at the centre of the lintel.

Fig. 137 shows a horse-peg to one side of the wall niche.

### Carved Ceiling in the Divankhanu

Figs. 138, 139 show carved ceiling which represents the climax of the wood carvings of the residence; it is certainly the finest carved ceiling in Gujarat, if not the best anywhere. The concept and design of such ceiling has been discussed earlier here, in addition to the usual flat pattern, there is a raised centre-piece consisting of a large suspended pendant, encircled by concentric rings of decoration, each ring having a different theme. The flat surrounding pattern is geometrical and floral and one can clearly see the nails by which the fretted pieces are fixed to the background of the planks. The border of the ceiling is shown in Fig. 140. To enhance the decorative effect, four additional plaques have been fixed to the four corners of the ceiling, each about 30 cm. high. All the various parts of the ceiling are painted in contrasting colours, but not overdone, so that the overall effect is very effective.

The centre-piece is not common to this category of carved ceiling and its concept and raised design are certainly copied from Hindu or Jain temples, particularly the suspended pendant. The elements of composition are as follows. The suspended pendant consists of separate petals which are quite obviously not completely carved from one block of wood, but some are individual pieces affixed to the main block (a few have fallen off). The pendant has a ring probably for hanging a lamp. The first circle of decoration around the pendant has ring of divine figures, male and female alternating, the males holding maces, the females fly-whisks, with costumes flaring as if in a dance. The imagery of a circular dance is, of course, well known in Gujarati culture since the two most popular folk dances, the *garba* and the *dundia ras*, are performed in this manner. These dances belong to the tradition of cow-herding for which the Saurashtra region was famous, and are part of the cult of Krishna and the *gopis*. The carving is on a single piece of wood which has been subsequently affixed to the ceiling.

The decorative ring beyond this (Figs. 138, 139) has a very curious theme: the figures are of mythical *nagins*, i. e. female serpent divinities having half human and half snake bodies, with the tails extended into long loops intertwined to form a very elegant, abstract pattern. The fact that the male counterparts (the *nagas*) are absent is noteworthy. It is very interesting to find the same motif repeated in wood in an example from Maharashtra<sup>28</sup> which is, however, of a much later date. Since it is quite unlikely that this was a borrowing from Vaso, one must assume that the original motif must exist elsewhere probably in some southern temple ceiling. This ring is also carved on a single piece which is probably part of the former one.

Around the above ring is a row of erect petals made of metal (painted) and nailed to the background (Fig. 139); some have fallen off. These must have been affixed last since one can



Fig.218. Two four-armed males with an elephant and bull respectively at their feet. The upper arms hold a flowery arch, the lower rosary and a pot of nectar.



Fig.219. A corner group of three separate figures. The central one is Garuda, with wings, subduing a snake. Two females on either side are holding rosaries.



Fig.220. A four-armed man with *toran* over head, and rosary in one hand.





see how they overlap the figures of the next outermost ring. The use of metal in decoration is rare in Gujarat and it is here executed in an amateur fashion.

The outermost ring has more widely spaced figures which have been individually cut out and nailed to the planks; one can see the nails in the centres of the accompanying flowers. These brightly coloured images contrast strongly with the darker background and in the dimly lit room look very attractive. All the figures represent divine creatures with bent legs and wings; they are bejeweled and crowned, and wear very curious costumes in which the lower portion is a mix between a skirt and a loose trouser. The figures are alternately male and female and all carry musical instruments. The postures are very lively, the arms shown naturally despite the flatness of the design, and the whole group is beautifully executed by one who must have been a master craftsman.

Fig. 140 is a close-up of the four-corner carvings. They are detached pieces which are not very convincingly fitted into the woodwork, and look like after-thoughts. They portray different aspects of the Krishna legend. In three scenes the central figure of Krishna has linked hands or arms with the flanking females in dance; in the fourth he holds water syringes which are used during the festival of holi. It is evident that the figures are not well integrated and having to work in the round with more than one figure has raised design problems which the craftsman has not been able to solve.

#### Residence of Mahendrabhai Desai, Vaso

The background to this family has already been given.

Figs. 141, 142 are various views of the balcony running around the courtyard at first floor level. The balustrade is flat and offers a great choice of geometrical and floral patterns executed with remarkable skill and beauty. These patterns are quite different from the usual

'Islamic' ones seen so far: they seem to be derived from stone balustrades in Mughal architecture. Instead of the usual plant meanders, one sees even the flowers arranged geometrically as a fine mesh over the whole surface.

The uprights (Figs. 143, 144) bear divine human figures, most of whom carry musical instruments. One female has a leg lifted to put on the *ghungrus* of dance. The figures are generally stiff despite the movement of legs and arms; the faces are broad with puffy cheeks and jowls of a peculiar character; the costumes are pure fantasy—note the leafy trousers—as befits an aerial being. It is important here to notice how real divinities are treated differently from these folkish divinities: the former are subjected to strict artistic conventions which leave little room for novelty; the latter are hazy, legendary creatures which are so ill defined that one can portray them at will. Such are the hosts of folkish *apsaras*, *vidyadharas*, *gandharvas*, *nagas*, etc. It is mainly these semi-divinities which appear in domestic carvings in profusion, the 'high' gods appear rarely.

Figs. 145, 146 are views and close-ups of one of the decorative windows around the central courtyard. It is constructed of massive timbers not at all structurally necessary, but these provide admirable surface for carvings, except the jambs which are always left plain. They are, however, painted here with figural and non-figural themes. This kind of painting on woodwork is very rare in Gujarat. The richness of the window is further enhanced by the running shelf overhead decorated with a frieze of pendants, below is the projecting sill supported by brackets shaped as elephant-heads, with small images in between. Still lower are horizontal bonding timbers with cross-pieces, covered with finely, incised carving. To either side of the jambs are plaques. The visual effect of this concentrated mass of carved woodwork is overwhelming. There are four such windows in all.





Fig.221. A general view of the entrance door with twin jambs fully carved from top to bottom.



Fig.222. A close view of twin jambs at fig. 221. Vertical lines of beading demarcate the rows of figures. The horizontal ledge have narrating scenes with small figures.



Fig.223. A close-up of individual figure on inner vertical batten. Each one is separated by a floral abstraction.



Fig.224. A figure on inner jamb holding a sword.



The twin lintels of the window are clearly differentiated structurally and in their carvings; a row of beading separates the two patterns, which are similar to those of Ahmedabad. The centre-piece is an auspicious vase (kalasha). The carvings on the bonding timbers, however, are in a very different style (Figs. 147, 148). We find a structure of overlapping circles in the upper range, and of overlapping meanders in the second, to which the foliage is attached. This is the only place where we have observed such a novel arrangement and it looks foreign.

One of the plaques, with a stylised peacock, and the adjoining bonding timbers at this higher level, are shown in Fig. 148. Next to it is a partial view of an attached column which is also carved – unusual for Gujarat. The carvings are eclectic, with a mixture of motifs taken from various sources, including embedded pendants. The painted flowers on the jamb are also visible.

The figures below the sill in this window, and in others, are all shown together below (Fig. 149).

### Interlude

It is useful to make a pause at this point in order to review some aspects of wood carving as revealed by the many examples seen so far. These two great mansions at Vaso, although of such late a date, show very little foreign or colonial influence; there is very little admixture of eclectic motifs. Column struts remain free of composite creatures with human figures oddly situated and lacking integration into an overall design. Design and motifs largely continue to be traditional even though elsewhere, at the same time, degeneration of design was taking place. What this means is that one cannot date a building or a style from the artistic evidence alone. Certainly there has been an artistic development, with motifs getting more complicated and eclectic, but new and old are

so inextricably mixed up that one cannot write any kind of architectural history based upon carvings. It seems to us that a very similar situation exists in Indian arts in general, i. e. one cannot completely rely upon the appearance of a particular motif, form or shape to positively accord it a specific date.

The other interesting conclusion is that the craftsman obviously worked from a given and accepted corpus of motifs which remained almost static over a period of time. A change of design was achieved by either recombining known motifs into new arrangements or by further refining and making complex a given motif. Genuine innovation scarcely appeared. The artistic tradition remained within a set boundary not because there was any organised pressure to do so, but simply because there was no impetus to change. When such impetus did come, it always came externally, for example from colonial influences or Maratha rule, and change was then readily accepted and tradition overthrown without hesitation. Tradition was being followed not because of any over-riding social commitment but because there was no serious alternative.

### Vadtal

The town has a very large Swaminarayan temple with much woodwork, but it is not illustrated because the quality of carvings is inferior.

### Cambay

This old, historical town has, surprisingly, very little wood carving. This is probably because it has been in decay since at least a hundred and fifty years, with no commercial regeneration even under colonial rule. The once rich Nawabs of Cambay have their old palace which has substantial woodwork but little wood carving, and is hence not illustrated.

### Umreth

Umreth is a historical town of some fame





Fig.225. A close-up of individual figure on outer vertical batten.



Fig.226. A figure on lower jamb holding a drum.



Fig.227. A narrative scene of the well-known legend of Narsimhaji overpowering the demon Hiranyakashipu. All attendants are watching.



Fig.228. Another narrative scene of Rama, seated on a throne, receiving Hanuman and attendants.



and is still the stronghold of the Khedaval Brahmins; it was once wealthy and the *Mint-i-Ahmadi* of 1761 A. D. says, "It is popularly known . . . that Ahmedabad had two golden wings – one Vadnagar and the other Umreth. There lived in these two kasbas (towns) most of the bankers and wealthy merchants who had capital of lacs. Through passage of time and descent of calamities both are now broken and scattered dust . . ." <sup>30</sup> Vadnagar is truly a ruined town but Umreth, though no longer prosperous, has a great deal of surviving woodwork and much fine wood carving. These carvings have certain local peculiarities. Many of the door jambs have bases of wood carved with figures of armed guardians. Another is the larger variety of finely carved door lintels. Balconies frequently carry winged figures and in some examples there are clearly religious themes such as Ganesha, Vishnu, ascetics, etc. Probably the strong Brahmin influence, as also the dominance of figural work as a whole, produced this bias. Unfortunately, shifted elsewhere, so that only external view could be studied.

### Example

#### House of Bhikhabhai Shelat, Bar Pipla

As this house was locked only the magnificent door lintel is illustrated. In Figs. 150, 151 one can see the lintel finest seen in Gujarat. The twin lintels maintain the structural distinction even in the designs of the carvings: the upper one has a linear meander fitting the form of the timber; the lower one has an L-shaped timber which permits a broader foliage springing from the corner and expanding upwards and towards the centre. The design of the foliage is quite different from the usual Gujarati style: the stems overlap each other but also pass through the centre of flowers in an artificial manner (in the lower lintel); the terminations of some are like sprays. This design is certainly foreign in inspiration, and is a very fine piece of work.

The upper lintel has a composite creature at the corners, plus very realistic elephants with trappings holding leaves. These elephants are matched by two at the centre which flank the goddess Lakshmi seated in between. The lower centre-piece has an enshrined four-armed Vishnu holding discus (chakra) and lotus, and flanked by female whisk-bearers wearing saris. It is our observation that the sari in Gujarati wood carving at once indicated Maratha influence (we shall see more of them in Baroda), i. e. it is a late phenomenon. The two centre-pieces over each other are unusual and do not match.

The carving of the *tolla* (Fig. 152) is equally eclectic but finely executed. A most unusual feature is at the level of the bracket-capitals of the jambs: a human figure, supported on a lotus, virtually projects into space. The figures in themselves are not significant, but the idea is. It is, of course, quite foreign to a wood-working tradition – or to any tradition for that matter. These figures are obviously 'stuck on' subsequently and the nearest resemblance is to that of bronzes where 'suspended' figures do appear.

The two jamb bases are shown in Fig. 153 one part has an armed retainer, the other a potted plant. Figures on such bases are known from temple architecture, but these do not seem to be copies of those, not even conceptually. It is simply the shifting of a known motif – the armed retainer – to a new locations.

Despite some drawbacks in design, this doorway taken as a whole is an outstanding example of wood carving.

#### House in Tikhani Pol

This is a small *khadki* whose houses, though, small, contain a great deal of fine wood carving – all belonging to Brahmin families. The houses are not illustrated separately but as a group.





Fig.229. A magnificent main entrance door with carving influenced by European eclecticism.

Figs. 154, 155, 156 show a view of the entrance door of Hasubhai and Jagdish Bhatt's residence (somewhat marred by the modern outer shutters added later). The outer jambs carry, instead of the usual *tollas*, carved figural

struts supporting a roof cantilever. The carvings on the twin lintels are similar to others and need no comment; the centre - piece is an enshrined Ganesha with grim-visaged whisk-bearers wearing saris. The two jamb bases have



Fig.230. A close-up of lintel shows the design in carving are European in concept and in details. The centre-piece has recessed planes.



armed retainers holding weapons in one hand and a bird in the other (the bird motif is copied from Ahmedabad). One figure has a shield, the other a bow slung over the shoulder. Part of the base has potted plants as motif.

The two struts to either side are blatantly eclectic and poorly composed : too many unrelated themes are put together clumsily. One has flute-playing Krishna as the central motif, the other a female with a churning stick and a pot on her head – obviously a milk-maid. Higher up is a seated ascetic with a rosary in one hand. One can see the Brahmanic influence at work.

Fig. 157 is a close-ups of a series of balustrade figures from the house of Someshwar Bhatt (locked normally). All the figures have religious over tones; some are of divinities which would otherwise only appear in haveli-temples (the Baroda examples document this). It will be later apparent that these religious figures are in fact copied from the Narasimhaji temple in Baroda which is near by, and thus clearly demonstrate how such themes travelled from temples to domestic houses.

The corner of the balustrade has triple figures ( Fig. 157 ) of a four-armed Vishnu in the centre bearing a discus and lotus, flanked by males, one carrying a staff, the other a flute. They are not well carved. They are part of the corner upright which thus permits the three figures to appear on two adjoining planes.

Fig. 158 show a range of different lintels. In Fig. 194 there is again the image of a seated ascetic (it is not certain whether it is four-armed, in which case it would represent a divinity difficult to identify). The crispness of the carvings stands out because of the thin coat of paint applied. Fig. 159 have foliage, parrots, and a vase.

Importance of Vadodara as a town grew somewhere in the 16th century A. D., and became dominant after its capture from the

Mughals by the Marathas in 1734 and the firm establishment of Gaekwad rule. As already explained, although Baroda came under the occupation of a large number of Maratha families, their residences, despite the great use of woodwork, have very little wood carving. Even the old palaces of the Gaekwads in the centre of the town (called the Sarkarvada) are almost bare of carvings. Some surviving Muslim buildings, including the old Muslim palace known as the Bhadra, also have very little wood carving. It is mainly the residences of merchants, bankers and revenue-framers which contain significant wood carving. In addition, there are a few haveli-temples with much carved wood.

Some of the characteristic feature of Baroda wood carving are : a great use of figural work on balconies and struts ; an unusually large number of erotic and amorous couples; figures borrowed from Maratha sources; scenes from popular Vaishnavism. If one compares the motifs of Ahmedabad with those of Baroda, it will be seen how very different they are.

### Examples

#### House of Sureshwar Desai, Ghantiala

This family was a historically important one and hence their beginnings can fortunately be dated, giving valuable clues regarding the age of the buildings. Sureshwar Desai was a revenue-farmer from Mughal times, i.e. before the coming of the Gaekwads in 1734. He was one of the four eminent citizens who secretly assisted the Maratha forces under the Gaekwad to capture the city, and after their rule was established he became an important functionary. He built his own large residence (Fig.161) sometime around 1734 and although very extensive in size, the simplicity of its wood carving can be seen from a photograph of a strut taken about 1978 – just before it was sold off and destroyed. The size of the residence proves that it was not any shortage of funds which prevented more of carvings. As already





Fig.231. A part view of the front frieze adorned with a grotesque bird grasping a necklace in its beak.

discussed it was the sense of urban insecurity which produced this kind of architecture.

Some years later – unfortunately this date is not known, but appears to be about the turn of the 18th century – the family built an adjoining building as an extension for administrative purposes and, probably, to house visitors. This second building was built in great magnificence with prominent wood carvings, and it still survives though much dilapidated. The building is rented out to petty tenants who have added partitions which obscure the original grandeur.

Fig. 161 is a general view of the elevation, much weathered and disfigured by the iron railing. The carvings on this frontage are not detailed because they have greatly deteriorated. Better specimens are in the interior.

Figs. 161, 162 are general views of the area

around the central courtyard. It will be noticed that the doors and windows are of much lighter construction and without *tollas*, instead the corners are mitred. This particular feature appears only on buildings constructed after the advent of the Marathas, and is probably borrowed from the Deccan. The relative plainness of the woodwork in the first floor as compared to the richness of the ground floor indicates the status assigned to each floor. The rich *divankhanu* of the first floor seen at Vaso is also here in the ground floor. The elements of the woodwork are of the now familiar kind and need no comment. (The iron railing is late). The curvilinear uprights of the balustrade bearing figures are similar to those seen at Umreth but Baroda is the source for the design.

Fig. 163 is a close-up of the figure on the balustrade upright. It is rather crudely carved



but that could be because it was the early stage of figural work. It bears musical instruments, wear archaic costumes, and has birds on the shoulders reminiscent of Ahmedabad. The corner figure presents a design problem because on a curvilinear surface the meeting point of carving balustrades is very awkward; how it has been solved can be seen in Fig. 162.

Fig. 164 shows details of the fully carved curvilinear surface of the balustrade : here the Islamic pattern is reproduced on a curving surface and becomes visually less effective. The design of cypresses, potted plants, and floral abstractions is similar to those seen elsewhere. The floral meander on the fascia board has a slight variation : the coils are reversed alternately.

Fig. 165 shows the ground floor which has a variety of very interesting carved ceilings, each one deliberately made different. The technique of constructing such design is always the same : small, fretted pieces of wood are nailed to a background of planks, producing a large evenly spaced pattern resembling textiles. It is of Islamic derivation and is discussed earlier.

#### House of Subhash Mody, Narasimhaji Pol

This little house has the most remarkable set of figural carvings of a kind found nowhere else in Gujarat. The figures are excellently carved and well preserved, while some of the themes are unique. The figures on the struts are virtually free-standing, and should really be called sculpture; those on the balustrade also stand out from their background even though this is curvilinear; while the upright figures are three-quarters in the round.

#### Figures on Struts

These are four in number on the ground floor and portray females holding musical instruments : a sitar, a sarangi (Figs. 166, 167) (an old stringed instrument played with a bow), a drum, and a shehnai or pipe. The figures are

the full length of the strut, i. e. about four feet long, and are not carved 'out of the strut' but are themselves struts somewhat resembling diagonal caryatids. They rest upon elaborate lotuses and their crowns form the units linking them to the short beams they support. The idea of thus boldly transforming a structural strut into a whole human figure is a natural culmination of a process already begun much earlier, i. e. of treating a structural member as a decorative piece. This tendency is no doubt a late baroque-like phenomenon, and artistically extravagant, but there is an inner logic in the development which cannot be ignored. The artist gradually takes over from the artisan. The end-product is convincing in this case because it is well done. The figures retain their solidity and seem quite able to carry the loads they support. If one compares these full figural struts with those from the Vasa house in Ahmedabad ( Figs. 90, 91 ), the difference will be immediately apparent. These figures are far too slender, with pierced portions, and stand at an angle which does not convey the weight; here the opposite is true.

However, even these figures are marred by small animals placed incongruously here and there, quite unrelated to the main theme, and this is a serious defect in composition. Being small in size, they fortunately do not intrude too much into the visual field. The figures themselves are well proportioned, with sensitive faces, and well arranged limbs. The hands holding the instruments are particularly well modulated. All wear saris characteristic of Maratha influence. Part of the richly carved *kamans* bridging columns can be seen next to the figures. The cusps have become complex, terminating in coils and buds of a distinctly European character.

It will be noticed that the column against which each strut abuts is straight (unlike the typical Gujarati free-standing column)—this



too is due to the influence of Deccan architecture.

### Figures on Balustrades

There are three compositions, all Vaishnava, carved onto the curvilinear surface (Figs 168, 169). The central one is crowded with figures (Fig. 168) but a closer examination reveals that there are three separate legends from the lives of Rama and Krishna juxtaposed next to each other in the most unusual manner. The central group depicts the flute-playing Krishna as cowherd flanked by fly-whisk bearers and a cow suckling a calf. To the right stands a single figure of Krishna holding snakes in his hands : a reference to the legend called *Kaliyadaman* wherein he subdues the snake *Kaliya*. Usually this scene is portrayed with Krishna dancing on its hood, but here due to the needs of the composition, it is shown differently. The group at the left depicts Rama enthroned with Sita seated on his left thigh - this is very characteristic pose for royalty in folk art, and it is not meant to be erotic. To the one side of Rama stands the monkey god Hanuman, a faithful devotee of his ; at the other is Lakshman with a bow slung over his shoulders. At the rear are fly-whisk bearers.

All the figures are finely carved, despite the small scale, and the whole is skillfully composed. What is most unusual is to find three legends, pertaining to the incarnations of Vishnu, all portrayed together in one panorama. Probably this is the only instance in Indian art where such a composition occurs.

The other two balustrade carvings are duplicated, and each shows a conventional flute-playing Krishna flanked by fly-whisk bearers. To either side are lions seizing creatures which are not clearly identifiable. A hunting scene such as the latter has nothing to do with the Krishna legend and is certainly added merely to produce a greater complexity. Animals are scattered on the struts in the same spirit.

The floral meander on the horizontal rail of the balustrade is very interesting ; the stalks gradually broaden out into leaves in a style quite foreign to Gujarat, it looks European, including the birds with heads turned back. The other meander also shows the same foreign character with birds with outstretched wings. These indications of strong foreign influence make it possible that the larger figures are also, at least conceptually, foreign inspired.

### Upright Figures

These are shown in Figs. 170, 171, 172, 173. They represent a very lively, unusual and interesting set of carvings. The one at far left on the building (Fig. 170) is a daring *mithuna* scene in which a couple playfully tease each other. The male pulls at one breast of the female while she attempts to snatch away his Maratha - style turban. Their legs are entwined. The costumes are Maratha. We saw only one other scene of such daringness, that at Vaso which is far more static in design. The eroticism shown here does not belong to the ritual variety seen in temples and other examples but seems to belong to the world of theatre; the Marathas are known to have patronised a kind of folk - theatre called *tamasha* in which such scenes were common, and that is the inspiration for this carving.

Fig. 171 is another erotic scene but this time the couple are dressed more aristocratically, particularly the male—he has a crown instead of a turban—and could possibly represent Krishna dallying with a *gopi* or milk-maid.

The last group (Fig. 173) shows a female seated on a wicker-work stool (*morha*) holding a playful youngster.

These four upright figures have one novel characteristic : the faces are no longer mere conventional masks but show personality. It is altogether a new kind of art of Gujarat.

### The Interior

The interior has a few small carvings



around the courtyard, but only one is shown because it is unusual.

There are some carvings on the first floor struts which are not illustrated as they are of an indifferent type.

It is remarkable how this small residence displays such a wealth of rich wood carving; it also demonstrates the prominence given to figural motifs.

#### House of Pandit, Narasimhaji Pol

This residence is located a few paces away from the one above. It is notable for a range of interesting figures on the balustrade (Figs. 174, 175, 176). They all show the Maratha influence in posture, costume and composition, and some are closely related to the previous house. There is the same attempt at novelty but less successful.



Fig. 232. A close-up of part of the attached column of the front verandah showing an elephant.

Fig. 174 shows erotic couple from the Mody house. It shows how certain motifs caught the fancy in a particular town and were unhesitatingly borrowed.

Fig. 175 shows two groups depicting what may be called the 'loving domestic bliss' – *dampati* in classical literature – in which a husband and wife are shown together

Fig. 233. A close-up of part of the entrance door jamb showing a rampant lion enchainé amidst foliage.



holding hands. It simply symbolises domestic felicity and has no erotic over-tones. One example only is shown here. The costumes are Maratha.

Fig. 176 represents a motif which we found repeated in a number of other Baroda houses : it shows a group of three figures from a dance scene. The female wears a frilled skirt and is flanked by two males, one playing a drum, the other a stringed sarangi. This kind of dance grouping bears no resemblance whatsoever to classical dance but is certainly related to the dance of wandering minstrels, or even to *tamasha*.

When one examines these figures closely, one cannot escape the feeling that they are copied from dolls. Dolls made of clay and painted almost exactly as these ones were once made in many parts of India and sold as curiosities. They were about six inches high but showed details quite clearly, in other words, what we have here is not original wood carving but a translation into wood from another medium. This would also explain the great difference from normal Gujarati wood carving.

Note the fringe of carving below the level of the figures. It is a more elaborate version of the bud - and - leaf motif we saw in Kapadvanj and elsewhere. This particular motif appears very frequently in Baroda and seems to be its original source within Gujarat. But as mentioned its earliest appearance is in Mathura dated 450 A.D.

#### House of Lalit Chandra Soni, Patoria Pol

This house continues the tradition of decorating the front balustrade with a variety of novel carving, but their clarity is marred by excessive paint which has chipped and flaked.

Fig. 177 focuses on the group at the extreme left of the elevation, at the corner, and shows a warrior armed with a lance and bow, wearing a helmet with a crescent on top (partly

broken). It would have been unidentifiable were it not for the Hanuman to one side (wearing a peaked helmet). This makes us believe that it is Rama. The female to the other side is a fly-whisk bearer. The composition is eclectic and unrelated to any Hindu visual motifs.

Fig. 178 is the corresponding group at the extreme right corner which also has trio of religious figures. The male in the centre is four-armed, carrying a mace and discus, and wearing the same kind of peculiar head - dress with a crescent - it is probably Vishnu, flanked by whisk-bearers.

In between these two corner figures there are six other groups, which too are conventionally amorous, hence not illustrated, the others are.

Fig. 179 also shows a figure wearing a helmet with a crescent, carrying a bow, and standing before a cow. The identification with Krishna is not certain but probable.

Fig. 180 shows a powerful, moustachioed male standing beneath what looks like a canopy of snake-heads (the crusted paint makes identification difficult), flanked by a female whisk-bearer. It was not possible to identify the figure : it cannot be Krishna because he is never shown with a moustache.

Fig. 181 shows a giant in regal dress carrying a male and female on his shoulders. There is a story in the *Mahabharata* of the huge Bhima carrying his brothers and Draupadi when they were exhausted, and this seems to illustrate the episode.

Fig. 182 shows an erotic group which is very dynamically carved with the female clasping the male with her legs and virtually riding on his hip. The dance-like pose adds to the liveliness. It is another example of the playful mithuna motif.

It will be seen how balustrade carvings in



Baroda have become rivals in novelty : the attempt is to seek for more divergent means of portraying existing motifs and of diversifying their details. Three very attractive centre-pieces are shown in Fig 183. They are not as fussy as some of the Ahmedabad examples, but show a relative simplicity of pattern which is very well distributed, with empty spaces left in between which enhance the contrast. The birds are also very effectively integrated in the design.

#### House of Maganlal Gandhi, Patoria Pol

This house is with certainty built at the same time as the Mody house shown earlier and some of its balustrade scenes are not illustrated as they are repetitive, such as Krishna with cows. The remaining are mixed in character, some being variants of well known motifs, others not identifiable.

Fig. 184 is clearly a variant of the Maratha amorous couple : the male has a drum and one arm around the female's shoulders while she is offering him a cup of wine. This kind of frivolous scene would normally be impossible in a Gujarati house, yet it, and all the others, appear on the houses of Gujarat merchant families. It is curious to find how they became acceptable under aristocratic Maratha influence.

#### House of Hirabhai Parikh, Desaino Khancho, Sultanpura

The three balustrade carvings shown here are not new so far as the theme is concerned - they all portray domestic *mithuna* - but they are beautifully executed and illustrate the general trend of the times.

Fig. 185 shows the couple drinking : the smile on the face of the man is marvelous.

Fig. 186 focuses on a new element : the armed warrior with a shield and dagger at the waist embraces a female while entwining one leg around her. They are probably not a married couple but lovers.

#### House of U. D. Shah, Kuberchand Khadki

The carvings in this house reach a climax in eclecticism and superficial showmanship. The faces indicate that they are executed by the same craftsman who did the carvings on the Mody house. But here the effort to be striking has spoilt the composition, and although the details are very skillful the total effect is confusing. The figures are quite marred by the excessive size of the wings which bear no relationship to the size of the figures. They are illustrated in Figs. 187, 188 and no further comment is needed. They are placed so as to mask beam - ends. Another entertaining figure from the top of a strut is shown in Fig. 189 which is of an ascetic.

#### Haveli Temple, Narasimhaji Pol

This is a famous temple in Baroda, built around 1800 A. D., by a Vaishnava family with the surname Parikh ; the descendants not only maintain it but also live on its first floor. It is one of the larger temples in size and has the typical domestic character in its architecture. Its carvings display both religious and secular themes in the figural work plus it has a very fine range of struts. Unfortunately, the carvings facing the south side - the rainy side - have deteriorated due to the climate and lack of maintenance. The main carvings are on the elevations ; the interior is insignificant.

Figs. 190, 191 show general view of the building. The second floor is a later addition. It will be noticed how the open balcony is very common in the Baroda region, as opposed to the more northern parts of Gujarat. This style represents the earlier tradition of architecture.

#### Carvings of the Front Elevation

These are mainly on struts which spring from attached columns in the wall, on the balcony above, and the figural struts of the first floor.

Figs. 192, 193 are views of the struts of the ground floor : all are of different designs except





Fig. 234. A frieze showing a row of elephant-heads and a row of droplets. The beam ends have broadened out into massive heads (top).



Fig. 235. A close-up of the fascia board above the frieze.

two; even those with floral patterns are not the same. The reason seems to be that since the quantity of woodwork meant to be carved was large, overall supervision could not be demanding and many carvers were left to produce variant designs merely keeping to general prescriptions and sizes. One of the

Fig. 236. A lintel with four horizontal range of design. The uppermost area shows dog-tooth fringe, below it are floral patterns with complex buds. The lower lintel has a traditional use as centre-piece.



struts, Fig. 193 has a very finely executed composite beast design with an elephant head. The wings are delicately indicated by shallow relief. Note the capitals of the attached columns: they are all of European design, proving that by this date foreign influence in the arts had already become very strong.

Figs. 194, 195 are views of some of the figural struts of the first floor (others are not shown). They are clumsily carved divine musicians, far



inferior to the beauty of the *kaman* next to them. Obviously different craftsmen were at work.

Figs. 195 is one of the balustrade figures: they are of average quality and are only shown because they occur on a haveli-temple, a class of building no seen much so far.

### Carvings of the South Elevation

This is a long frontage with much carved woodwork but weathering has affected most of it so that relatively less is illustrated here. The balustrade has some curious motifs.

The relatively inferior quality of some of the carvings on this temple is not an isolated phenomenon: the same thing was observed in the great Swaminarayan temple at Ahmedabad. These semi-public buildings show an inferior workmanship when compared to purely private residence, and there must be a reason for this. It seems that in all such cases, the client not being an individual or even an individual family, but a group, the degree of personal attention must have been inevitably slack, resulting inferior work. Further, the appreciation of what constitutes good quality would be equally vague, a group clientele.

### House of Babubhai Shroff, Mehta Pol

This last example from Baroda illustrates a variation on a, by now, well known theme : namely the Islamic type of carved balcony. The floral patterns show grapes, cypresses, branching foliage, etc., and these may be compared with the example from Umreth. Both seem to be by the same craftsman.

### Dabhoi

Dabhoi is a very ancient town once called Darbhavati founded about the 10th century A. D., and the fortified walls still exist. But the town itself has completely lost its grandeur and wealth. It was already ruinous in the 18th century during the Maratha attacks. As a result, the houses are small and insignificant but there survives a considerable amount of finely carved

woodwork of a late date when eclecticism was rampant. Among the peculiarities of Dobhoi carvings are figural struts bearing horses in large size, and a large number of ascetic-like small figures dispersed variously.

### House of S. A. Shah, Vakilno Banglo

This house was locked, so that only external views could be obtained. The balcony has the most extraordinary motifs executed in a most extraordinary style seen nowhere else. Here, on a flat balustrade, appear carvings with Hindu themes (usually they were Islamic). The carving cover the available space fully in an evenly distributed manner reminiscent of tapestry, with figures embedded within floral patterns. It is an original work and of a high quality. The other carvings on the elevation are less fine.

Fig. 196 is a view of the front elevation. There are carvings on the balustrade, on the fascia board underneath, on the struts of ground and first floor, and on the *kamans*. The attached columns are obviously of European design and reveal the late date of the building, probably the same as the Baroda haveli-temple of about 1800 A. D.

Figs. 197, 198, 199 are close-ups of the balustrade : there are three scenes. In Fig. 197 the male figure could be Krishna holding in one hand, what looks like, a double-headed stick, possibly used in the *dandia-ras* folk dance. What the other hand holds is not clear. The flanking females bear fly-whisks, and have cows to either side. The foliage swirls between the figures but does not confuse the composition.

Fig. 198 shows the second panel with Vishnu in his incarnation as Narasimha (the man-lion) ripping open the bowels of the demon Hiranyakashipu. The lion-aspect is, however, not brought out by any artistic symbol. To either side stand attendants, and beyond them winged composite beasts. The latter do not belong to the legend but are merely space fillers.



Fig. 199 has a scene which is a little obscure. The central figure is a four - armed moustachioed male holding a spear and possible stylised drum, and is seated upon a tiger (or is it a lion?) – which would identify him as Shiva. To the left are two men blowing a conch and a trumpet, with flowing hair. On the other side an unidentifiable figure – possibly a female – and a four-armed Ganesha holding a

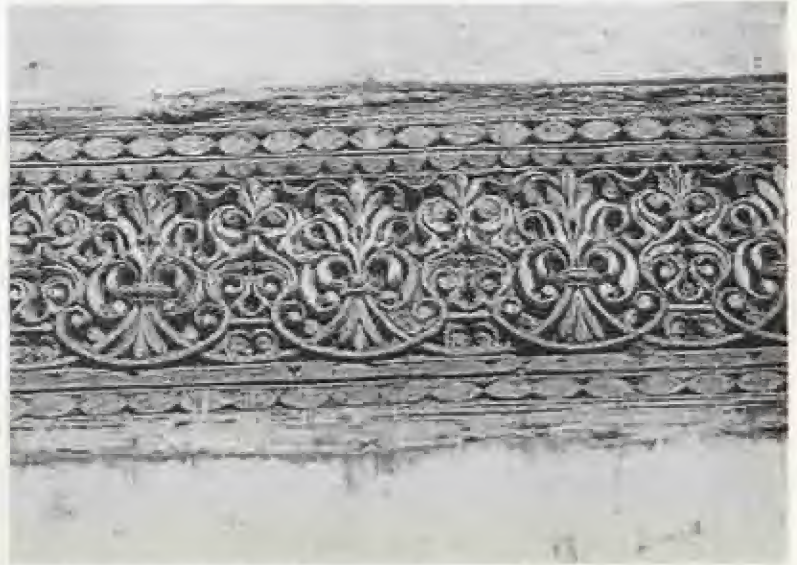


Fig.238. Two carved wooden bases of the door jambs(middle).



Fig.237. A carved bonding timber with a floral medallion pattern in a front verandah of a house (top).

Fig.239. Two wooden bases of verandah columns. Floral patterns have birds at the corner.



rosary and weapons. Ganesha belongs to the Shaiva mythology and reinforces the identification of the central figure. But if so, it is a Shiva never thus portrayed elsewhere.

The fascia board below the balustrade has four plaques of great interest.

Fig. 200 is clearly the female goddess Durga standing on the corpse of Shiva (the snake around his neck is visible), holding in one of its four arms a severed head, in



another a sword, the remaining hands are free. Two lions flank her. She has flowing hair and her tongue protrudes in the accepted manner. The whole composition is full of vitality.

Fig. 201 is of a four - armed goddess Lakshmi attended by the usual twin elephants.

Fig. 202 portrays Durga again, riding on her vehicle, the lion, bearing aloft weapons including a sword; she inclines dramatically to the right and an attendant stands as a counterfoil to the movement. This composition is also artistically very fine.

Fig. 203 is not clearly identifiable, but is certainly an armed goddess.

In the above, we find themes from two opposing traditions : the Vaishnava and the Shaiva, and that is quite unusual.

The figural struts are of inferior quality and hence not illustrated.

### Miscellaneous Carvings

#### Horse Struts from House of Champak G. Shah, Shrimali Vaga

(Fig 204) – Given the search for novelty, it was almost to be expected that struts such as these would appear. They are nevertheless interesting and well done. The riders on these galloping steeds are bent forward close to the manes as befits experienced horsemanship. Both riders represent soldiers holding muskets of ancient design – note the curved stocks. The bridle is broken in one case and looks like a lance but it is not. The horses themselves are fairly well carved and the whole composition is pleasing. This motif appears nowhere else in Gujarat.

### Winged Figures

Fig. 205 shows a very different kind of figural strut. The figure has become reduced to an abstraction; the limbs are rounded and flowing, and match the robe which has flown into a pure form, producing a very striking

effect of monumentality. It is the protruding wings (broken in one case) which disturb the design. We shall see a similar design in a historical example from Broach.

### Dholka

Dholka was never a town of any great importance; it was once a garrison town bordering Saurashtra and today has mediocre architecture and little wood carving. The main wood carvings here are in the great Swaminarayan temple Fig. 206 which are much finer than those of Ahmedabad ; and in some private residence. But there is nothing typical of Dholka.

### The Swaminarayan Temple

In keeping with the tradition of all Swaminarayan temples, the wood carving is very ornate, eclectic, over-decorated with mixed motifs, but in this case the details and execution are individually superb. The principal carvings are on the struts Figs. 207, 208 and capitals, of which there are many arranged in a long row in the main hall for pilgrims (Fig. 206). The mass view of these columns and struts is magnificent. The designs seen from the side are often different from those seen in front we have sometimes illustrated both views and sometimes only one.

Fig. 209 show the composite beast, partly elephant, partly lion and partly bird which is a favourite motif in this temple. The carving has now become sensuous with numerous moulded surfaces and deep hollows. The frontal portion has a medley of motifs each perfect in themselves but somewhat confusing as a composition. At the bottom is a winged kneeling figure with a stylised snake between the legs and is certainly Garuda, the mythical vehicle bird of Vishnu. At the top is a seated figure holding a lotus which cannot be identified. Between them is a confusing effusion of plants lacking unity of design.



Figs. 210, 211 show frontal views of another strut in which one sees an even greater mixture of motifs. At the top is a mace-wielding Hanuman; just below the gaping jaws of a mythical beast spouting foliage; and at the bottom a moustachioed Garuda.

Fig. 212 has a novel strut design: an armed retainer with a sword and shield, wearing a Rajasthani head-dress.

Figs. 213, 214 show close-ups of column capitals and bracket capitals of which there are a great variety. They carry a single main motif finely executed and are very good designs. The main motif is flanked by receding planes which emphasizes the former. In Fig. 213 there is a composite beast excellently carved given the minute scale; in Fig. 214 is a miniature battle scene between men and demons.

Two very elegant carvings from the capitals are shown in Figs. 213 and 214. The manner in which part of the ornament overlaps downwards across the projected edge of the cornice is superbly done. Finally, a stone carving from the base of one of the columns is also visible. Two lions share a single head: this detail is very ancient, appearing in Buddhist art. At the bottom is a conventional *graha* or monster copied temple architecture where they abound.

#### House of Bipin Vyas, Unda Pada

In this house are a set of very unusual balustrade panels (Figs. 215, 216, 217) carved with floral patterns of West Asian design, formed with plain wood borders so that they resemble framed pictures.

#### Broach

Broach was famous in ancient times for being the port through which goods were exported and imported between Gujarat and West Asia—it was known to the Greeks and Romans as Barugaza. Due to the silting of the river channel, trade declined, and the town gradually decayed and never recovered. It was

for some time under direct rule of the East India Company and that would explain how so many foreign, hybrid motifs entered into the sphere of wood carvings. There are, however traditional examples also. (Fig. 218)

#### Haveli-temple of Ranchodji, Dholani

This temple is about 150 years old, belonging to the Vaishnava sect and has a very fine set of balustrade carvings in good condition, not quite ruined by the paint recently applied.

Fig. 219 is a corner group of three separate figures. The central one depicts the mythical Garuda, the bird-like vehicle of Vishnu, in anthropomorphic form with wings, subduing a snake. The flanking female figures bear rosaries and flowers. All figures stand below arched wreaths and stand on elaborate lotuses.

Fig. 220 is a four-armed male again with an elephant at the feet, the objects in the upper arms are identical with the previous one but in reverse order, the lower objects are identical. This must, then, be Indra. The figures of Indra and Indrani are to the either side of a figure (shown next) which is just in line with the main entrance and thus has enhanced importance. It is another four-armed figure, male, in which the upper arms hold a flowery arch or *torana* overhead, the lower the rosary and pot of nectar with a bull at the feet—This is usually the vehicle of Shiva but as none of the other signs confirm it, such an identification seems quite improbable. What it probably represents is 'Ranchodji' himself—another name for Vishnu who frees men from their 'debts' to mankind. This main figure at the entrance with two deities to either side thus makes up a trio of three prominent deities. The two Indras then function as subordinate deities.

All the figures shown above share some interesting and common characteristics. They are very slender in proportion—unusual in Gujarati figural work—and stand in dance-like poses of great elegance, except for the three



main deities who are more stiffly carved. This distinction is intended to emphasize their identity, i.e. dance-like poses are of the lesser beings, the more formal stance being that of gods. The gods have sashes which go over the arms and before the legs; the others have sashes which twist between the bent legs. These minute but significant variations in composition indicate that the craftsman who carved them was more conscious of the classical tradition and introduced these subtleties deliberately. The whole approach is quite different from the more folk-like attitude seen elsewhere. One has to compare the carvings of the Narasimhaji temple (also Vaishnava - Fig. 195) with this one to see the enormous difference.

#### **Temple of Ramji, Chunarvad**

This is a tiny temple containing an almost bizarre kind of wood carving, especially on the main entrance door. The carvings are in very flat relief located in most unusual parts of the woodwork, namely on jambs, ledges and battens, and all of it is figural. The designs are crude, sometimes limbs are twisted and compressed into awkward positions, proclaiming them as the work of a pure village carpenter. Yet, they are full of interest on account of a wealth of social details and the archaic character of the costumes and implements. It is as if one were seeing a very ancient, primitive and original stage in wood carving.

The entrance door was illustrated in the **Art in Industry Monograph Series** published in 1985, claiming that it dates from the 17th century - which is quite conjectural <sup>41</sup>.

Fig. 221 is a general view of the entrance door (the wicket gate partly obscuring it is late). It has twin jambs fully carved from top to bottom with individual figures set within an arch and columns, each separated by a floral abstraction. Vertical lines of beading demarcate the rows of figures. The vertical battens of the

shutter (also called stiles) are similarly carved with individual figures separated by rosettes. The horizontal ledges, on the other hand, have narrative scenes with small figures crowding the spaces. The cusped arch above and lintel carry more figures. While it is tempting to illustrate all the figural work, due to space shortage, only the most interesting are shown.

Fig. 223 is one of the figure from the outer jambs: all figure like this of them are females holding various musical instruments carved to a much smaller scale than the figures themselves. They wear a skirt which divides in the middle revealing the legs, and carry pots on the heads.

Figs. 224, 225, 226 are figures from the inner jambs: all are males holding various implements such as a sword and shield, or a kettle-drum. They wear a shorter skirt and are be-crowned. The male and female figures, though in adjacent ranks, are not related to each other functionally.

Fig. 227 is the narrative scene. In Fig., 228 Rama seated on a throne, receives Hanuman and attendants. Note how the tail of the monkey god winds around the rivet of the ledge so that the composition is not disturbed.

#### **House of Ratanlal Mohanlal Shah, Haji Khan Bazar**

This residence has a great amount of wood carving but most of it is somewhat inferior and strongly influenced by European eclecticism - hence not illustrated. What is, however, shown is the magnificent main entrance door (Figs. 229, 230). It will be at once apparent that the design is wholly European both in concept and in details, except for two small features. One is the beading; the other the recessed planes of the centre-piece on the lintel.

#### **House of Chunilal G. Tralsawala, Chhipvad Road**

This is another of those houses heavily







influenced by eclectic European influence; the carvings are shown because they are above average in quality and good specimens of this kind of work ( Figs. 231, 232, 233 ).

Fig. 231 is a part view of the front frieze adorned with a grotesque bird grasping a necklace in its beak.

Fig. 232 is a close-up of part of the attached column of the front veranda.

Fig. 233 is a close-up of part of the entrance door jamb : it shows a rampant lion enchained amidst foliage.

### **House of Ishwarbhai V. Jadhav Delhiwalao Khancho**

This house has been partitioned between tenants and some of the views are from different parts of the frontage. It is remarkable how, amidst so much European influence, this gem of a traditional work (with some minor exceptions) was executed.

Fig. 234 shows part of the elevation. The frieze now has both the typical features usually seen separate, namely the row of elephant-heads and the row of droplets. The beam ends at the right have broadened out into massive 'heads' below which are much smaller capitals and are not typically Gujarati but common in Broach. Fig. 235 is a close-up of board above the frieze. The floral scroll has crossed tendrils in reversed curves, terminating in buds – the whole being a very beautiful design. Something very similar appears on the door lintels.

Fig. 236 is the view of the door lintels. There are in all four horizontal ranges of design. Uppermost is a thin band of bonding timber with a dog-tooth fringe. Below it is the upper

lintel carved with a floral pattern similar, but more intricate, to the fascia board : the buds are more complex. The lower lintel has the traditional vase as centre-piece within recessed planes and some blank space followed by a bit of scroll. Further below is part of the bracket-capital of the jamb and a single scroll. All the floral patterns are superbly designed and finely carved, and produce an overall harmony together with the fascia board.

Fig. 237 is a part of the equally beautiful carved bonding timber in the front verandah. Here the pattern consists of floral medallions resembling European work but still matching previous patterns.

Fig. 238 shows the carved wooden bases of the door jambs (they may be compared with bases seen at Umreth. Each base is split into two parts to conform to the twin jambs they support, and the design of each part is different.

Fig. 239 is the wooden base of verandah columns. Wooden bases to such exposed columns are never found in the rest of Gujarat : they appear only in Broach and Surat for reasons which are not clear. Possibly stone (the usual material) was difficult to procure in these southern parts. The design basically copies stone carving except of the birds at the corners.

### **Surat**

Surat, the town best known to European travellers and hence much described, was almost totally destroyed in a major fire in the year 1837 A. D. What was re-built thereafter was also very often in timber but no longer in the traditional style, instead, adopted and a debased 'Bombay' style with meager and inferior carving was used. These are, therefore, not illustrated. There is, however, one outstanding example of wood carving which is described below.

### **Chintamani Parsvanath Jain Temple, Shahpur**

This richly carved temple interior is

Fig. 240. The carving shows a wealth of geometric patterns and plants in a curving balcony. The struts are typical of Gujarat, but the panels in between have a pierced design which shows Islamic sources. The iron railing is colonial. Thin metal bars of the window below are entwined to form a grill.



illustrated in the Census volume referred to earlier, and its date is given as 1540 A. D. The report states that the woodwork once belonged to an even earlier temple from which it was salvaged and re-installed here. This information was confirmed by the local trustees of the temple. If this were to be accepted, then it would mean that we have here one of the earliest surviving specimens of Gujarati woodwork. This woodwork is certainly very impressive but unfortunately it is mostly copies of designs in stones, particularly the columns of the main hall.

The plan of the temple is different from the usual haveli-temples : there is a large columned hall with a finely painted wooden ceiling, leading to the shrine which is enclosed by a carved wooden screen ; around the shrine is a circumambulatory passage along whose sides are small carved wooden niches containing images of the 24 Jinns.

Photography is by and large forbidden within this temple, especially of any of the images, and we were fortunate in being given restricted permission. All of the woodwork is very colourfully painted which, in the subdued light, looks very attractive.

The columns (the columns themselves are not shown, being copies of stone work) are enclosed within intricately carved niches with arches and numerous mouldings, and represent courtiers holding various implements of their office. Some of the images are not carved but painted onto a portion of blank surface left for the purpose on the column and this is the most unusual technique where the miniaturist and the woodcarver work together. In another variant, the attached columns at the sides of the hall have no carvings at all but are painted with a series of figures. It is of the flute-playing Kṛiṣṇa very finely executed.

### **Saurashtra**

As already mentioned, Saurashtra has

never had much woodwork due to scarcity of supplies. Its place was taken by stone and stucco, the latter material being used for decorative purposes. However, a certain prestige remained associated with wood carvings and these appeared in a fragmentary and intermittent manner in odd locations. It could be observed that almost all of such wood carving displayed strong western influence and not being of the same quality as what we have so far seen; it is shown in only a few outstanding examples. In other words, Saurashtra cannot be described according to towns, but only according to scattered examples.

### **Examples**

#### **Jharokhas from Bhuj Palace :**

Here the decoration is divided between woodwork and stucco. The traceried parapets, the smaller grilled windows are in stucco, the cantilevered supports of the *jharokha* are in stone, and only the pierced screens of the latter are in wood. The *jharokha* may be compared with those of Palanpur Fig. 240 and Radhanpur in order to see the difference in materials.

#### **Woodwork from Palace of Fateh Muhammad, Patwadi Nako, Bhuj :**

Fateh Muhammad was a great military commander of the Hindu ruler of Bhuj (Kutch), and this sumptuous palace was built about 1788 A. D. It has remarkable stucco decorations externally; internally there is carved woodwork.

#### **Halvad Palace in Dhrangadhra State :**

The rulers of this state built the older palace at Halvad in the 16th century but many parts were added later; the examples of woodwork shown are of this later date. The woodwork is obviously copied from North Gujarat and is of the less intricate variety. There are magnificent wooden screen in the first floor, meant for women to look, though without being seen. The fretwork design is quite uncharacteristic of Gujarat.





Fig.241. One of the most decorative doors in Gujarat. The outer jamb is carved for part of the way. This door has twin tollas, the upper one has elephants. The twin lintels have elephants with foliage and the lower lintel have winged figures with trumpet.

#### **Strut from house of Charandas Swaly, Mundra :**

The Swaly family is an old, historical one which once had close trading and administrative contacts with East Africa, particularly Zanzibar where they had established themselves. Their house has borrowed many features from abroad, and in this detail we find a magnificent example of a European design translated into a local system. The structural details of the woodwork are typically Gujarati, with capital, bracket-capital and strut forming the system, but each member has been transformed. The shaft of the column is plain; the capital copies stone carving from Europe, as does the extended arm of the bracket-capital. The S-form of the strut is also

basically Gujarati but the details of the carving are wholly European, and it is interesting to see how the indigenous craftsman has adjusted to the borrowing. It is not clear how such strong European influence in a plastic material could develop: there were no actual examples to copy, i.e. there were, then, no European buildings in Saurashtra where such designs could be seen and imitated. Probably plaster casts were imported initially as models, in order to produce stucco designs which were common in Saurashtra, and some of them were then copied in wood. In other words, it is stucco decoration which is the actual source of such foreign designs.

#### **Miscellaneous Door from Mahuva (Fig. 251)**

This is one of the most decorative doors



seen by us in Gujarat : the design is of a later date and eclectic but the overall effect is not unpleasing. Some of its peculiarities are the following. The outer jamb is carved for part of the way, and both bases are carved. There are twin *tollas*, the upper one having elephants reminiscent of Nadiad. The twin lintels have, in the upper range elephants and foliage – but quite different to that of Ahmedabad – the lower winged figures with trumpets, and a Ganesha with female attendants. The floral patterns are not as well done as those seen earlier. One can see throughout Saurashtra that there is no real indigenous repertoire of wood carving styles or motifs : all are borrowed.

If one takes an over-view of all the illustrations, what appears striking is a basic unity in the designs of wood carving in Gujarat

– barring the few foreign – inspired examples. This could have occurred only if there had previously existed an overall unity of wood – working as a whole and of carpentry in particular. And one is justified in positing that the centre for such a unified tradition lay in North Gujarat from where it was diffused elsewhere. If this is the case for one kind of craft, namely wood carving, one may also be entitled to posit a similar diffusion for the other plastic art, namely stone carving, for the two are not quite unrelated. The experience gained in studying wood carving may then serve to prove that stone carving also began in North Gujarat. If one seeks to further pin-point the area from where this art must have originated, then it must have been the area around Patan (ancient Anahillapur) which was the first important capital of Gujarat.



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## GLOSSARY

Apsara	:	A celestial damsel who resides in the sky.
Asan	:	A seat with back rest.
Attached column	:	Additional verticle column which is embedded three quarters within a wall.
Ashlar masonry	:	The short upright boarding in garret which cuts off the acute angle between the roof and the floor.
Battens	:	A long flat strip of squared timber or metal used for clamping the boards of a door etc.
Bharni	:	A peice of wood placed on the top of pillar to support beam.
Bhadra	:	A gentlemen.
Bonding timbre	:	A horizontal wooden member embedded flush with a wall and connected with other similar members to hold masonry together.
Baroque	:	Highly ornate and extravagant architecture.
Balustrade	:	A railing supported by balusters which forms an ornamental parapet to a balcony.
Bel-tel	:	Black protecting coating of oil applied on wood.
Bhakti	:	Devotion to the God.
Bracket capital	:	An additional piece of wood inserted between the capital and shaft of a column.
Bhang	:	Intoxicating beverage drunk by some religious sect.
Capital	:	The head or cornice of a pillar.
Cantilevered balcony	:	A balcony supported by long bracket or beam etc. projecting from a wall.
Chakra	:	Discus.
Chawk	:	An internal, central courtyard.



Column	:	An upright cylindrical pillar often slightly tapering and usually supporting an entabature or arch.
Corinthian capital	:	Of an order characterized by ornate decoration and flared capital with rows of acanthus leaves etc.
Daitya	:	A demon.
Dampati	:	Husband and wife.
Dandiya-ras	:	A folk dance of Gujarat performed by males and females moving in clockwise and anticlockwise circles respectively at the same time with wooden or metal sticks in their hands.
Darshan	:	The moment when devotees see the diety in a shrine.
Dhoti	:	A loincloth worn by male Hindus.
Divankhanu	:	A reception room.
Facia board	:	A long flat surface of wood covering the ends of rafters.
Frieze	:	A band of carving between column capitals and balustrade of a running balcony.
Gajadanta	:	A round peg.
Ganesha	:	The elephant headed Hindu diety.
Garbha-griha	:	Sanctum sanctorum.
Garuda	:	A mystical bird vehicle of the God Vishnu.
Gauri	:	A female diety.
Gavaksha	:	A window (Its literal meaning is cow's eye)
Ghar-derasar	:	A domestic shrine in jain house.
Ghagra	:	A skirt worn by ladies.
Ghungaru	:	Jingling bell.
Gopi	:	Devotee of Lord Shri Krishna.
Graha	:	Planet conjunctions symbolised by demon mask.
Guru	:	A religious head.
Haveli	:	A large residential mansion.
Haveli temple	:	A temple designed like a residential house where diety of worship is Krishna. The family tending diety also resides in the same building.
Holi	:	A festival of colours.
Jali	:	A screen with mesh.
Jamb	:	A side post of a doorway, window or fireplace.
Jharokha	:	A ceremonial balcony from which the ruler appears before his citizens on special occasions.
Joist	:	Each of a series of parallel supporting beams of timber used in floors, ceilings etc.



Kalash	:	A vase.
Kaman	:	An arched panel inserted between the upper portions of column.
Kamandalu	:	Earthen, wooden or metal water pot of an ascetic made up from gourd or metal with a handle for serving water.
Khadki	:	An entrance hall used either as a shop or as a place to receive clients or as a workshop by artisans.
Kinnara	:	A celestial body who is expert in music and dance.
Kumbhi	:	A stone or wooden base of a pillar.
Lintel	:	Horizontal supporting member above the door-frame.
Makara	:	A mystical creature often depicted with a snout or trunk.
Malvan	:	A village shirne.
Mandapa	:	A hall in front of the shrine of a Hindu temple.
Morha	:	Wicker work stool.
Naga	:	A mythical snake (male).
Nagin	:	A mythical snake (female).
Nagarsheth	:	Town mayor.
Odhni	:	A half sari tucked at waist and wrapped above only.
Ordo	:	A room, specially rear room.
Osri	:	A verandah
Otlo	:	A front portion consisting of a front verandah.
Parsal	:	A front room.
Pado	:	A cluster of houses.
Pol	:	An urban arrangement where one can enter from one or two guarded entrances to cluster of houses.
Pura	:	Suburb.
Purlin	:	A wooden member used to support roofing rafters. While the latter are inclined parallel to the slope, the former are horizontal. The flying purlin is one which rests not on masonry cross walls, but on small struts projecting below the eaves.
Purna-ghata	:	A vase of plenty - an auspicious symbol carried on door lintels.
Pratihara	:	A door guardian.
Pushti Marg	:	A sect founded by Vallabhacharya.
Raveshi	:	The inner verandah next to the courtyard.
Rakshak	:	Forest giant.
Ratikrida	:	Errotic love-play..



Sari	:	A garment worn by women.
Sarangi	:	A musical instrument with strings.
Sardula	:	Partly elephant, partly lion and partly bird.
Shaft	:	A slender column.
Shikhara	:	The spire-like crowning part of a Hindu temple.
Sompura	:	Traditional temple-builders and stone-carvers.
Sojala	:	A mezzanine floor for women overlooking the central courtyard.
Strut	:	Support-hold in place or strengthen by an upright, diagonal support.
Suthar	:	A caste of carpenters.
Sutradhar	:	Originated from Sanskrit. One who works by holding the strings, he set out the measurements in architecture.
Tamasha	:	A kind of folk theatre.
Tambur	:	A musical instrument.
Tolla	:	A large wooden peg driven into the wall.
Toran	:	Wreath of flowers, leaves etc. for decoration on festive occasion.
Tribhanga	:	Bent at three places or joints.
Turaga	:	A horse-peg, a wall peg fashioned into the form of a rampant horse in half exit body.
Vada	:	A cluster of houses of same community.
Vaniya	:	Baniya.
Vidyadhara	:	Heavenly musicians.
Vyala	:	A composite beast, partly lion, partly bird, partly elephant.
Yaksha	:	Mythical tree-spirit.

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